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Enemies beset her in that house of mystery, but suddenly there was a man beside herstrong and tough and in love with her . . .

The Share Nour Danger

Dramatic Love Story by LEIGH HADDOW

CHAPTER 1 Key To A Mystery

was strange, Barbara thought, this feeling of having been here before. She stood at the entrance to the twisting drive, gazing across meadows to an old country house.

It had tall chimneys rising from a jumble of blue-grey roofs, and in the mellow afternoon light its windows were the same colour as the golden sandstone from which it was built.

Amid its own parklands it made a pleasant picture, but if she had seen Craven Court before, it must have been when she was very young.

Her vague memories disturbed her, looked.

They drew her a little deeper into the mystery left for her by her mother, a dark, silent woman of secrets who had recently died.

Should she go on, or should she turn back-to London and furnished rooms she had shared with her mother?

Undecided, Barbara stared at the house. She was nineteen, a tall, intense girl, with jet black hair cut so short that it clung to her head in shining petals. Her eyes, clear blue, with the brows winging away, were troubled. Her red mouth was touchingly childish, yet the delicate oval face had strength of character that people often over-

she had found, addressed to her, among her mother's possessions. It read:

"If anything happens to me, go to Craven Court, near Elswich in Suffolk, and tell Mrs. Georgina Temperley that the time has come to open the box the enclosed key fits and show you what is in it.'

That was all—a cryptic message and

a small key.

Barbara had never heard of Mrs. Georgina Temperley, or of Craven Court. Yet now, as she gazed at the house, she knew she had been here before.

It was hard to say when, because she had seen so many places. For as long as she could remember she and her mother had been on the move from one town to another-finding new rooms, new schools for her and then, new jobs. They'd no roots, and devoted though they had been, they had never really understood one another.

Was it because her mother had kept the past so much to herself? Barbara knew was that her father had been killed early in the war, leaving some money that had soon gone. They had no relatives, no friends, so-who was this Mrs. Georgina Temperley and what was in the mysterious box?

It was no use guessing! She started towards the house, and was halfway there when a shooting brake came racing along the drive behind her.

As she stood aside, it stopped. There were two young men in it, and a girl at the wheel who called to her. "Hi, there! Can we help?"

The girl was a most unusual blonde, her pale yellow hair so beautifully cut and waved that it looked as if a craftsman had fashioned it out of She had sparkling emerald green eyes under full lids and long brown lashes. Her smile was warmfriendly.

From her handbag she took the note; the two young men were watching her with interest.

"Thank you. I have a message from mother for Mrs. Temperley, and if you can tell me where I can find her—"

There was a sudden sharp silence,

then the blonde spoke.

"But-my Aunt Georgina is dead!" "Oh! I'm so sorry to have-"

"It isn't your fault. I'm Denise Temperley and my Aunt Georgina died six months ago. It-just made me feel a little bit queer to hear you speak as if she were still alive." The girl had recovered and was smiling again. "Well, my offer to help still holds. What was the message?"

Barbara hesitated, inclined to call the whole thing off, despite her long journey to this remote spot, but the man sitting beside the girl spoke.

"Now, Denise, it may be private, and you can't expect her to discuss it. in the drive!" He was almost as fair as she was, with serene blue eyes in the handsomest face Barbara had ever seen.

"Come to the house and tell us all about it over tea," the girl invited. "You'll be needing a cup, if you've walked from the village. Julian-make room for her!"

The young man sprawled across the back seat opened the door for Barbara.

"Smart girl in City outfit plus high heels arrives at country mansion with mystery message for dead woman," he drawled. "Sounds like a thriller, doesn't it? What a lovely body Denise would make, if you've come to do her in."

"Don't pay any attention to him," the blonde called over her shoulder. "He's my childhood sweetheart, and he's still very fond of me, aren't you, Julian darling?"

"You'd sack me if I said I wasn't." He turned to Barbara, "I'm her agent, hired to run the Temperley estates and Barbara went across, conscious that to keep people from robbing her. The her lawver-

"Robert Soames, my best friend,"

Denise finished.

"And I'm Julian Baxter. Now you know us, but we still don't know you, Miss-

"Crosby-Barbara Crosby."

They arrived at the house, and Barbara had a confused impression that Robert Soames, tall, golden, and even better looking than she had thought, was a good deal older than the others

-about twenty-eight.

Julian Baxter was of medium build, and rather attractive in a dark, tough way. He had thick, wavy hair and alert brown eves in a lazy face which, Barbara thought, could be sullen. His mouth was probably the key to his character-it was strong, with more than a hint of ruthlessness.

She wondered what it would be like to be kissed by that mouth—and was astounded that such a thought should occur to her. It heightened the colour

in her cheeks.

Glancing at her with those mocking brown eyes, the man grinned.

"Got your story ready? It had better

be good."

She didn't know what he meantsensed antagonism that puzzled her.

The front door was open. As they went in Barbara knew what she would see—a broad oak staircase that branched to left and to right.

It was there.

A housekeeper appeared, a rosy, white-haired little woman with a well-

scrubbed look.

"Tea in the sun-room, please, Mrs. Padgett," Denise said. "This way, Miss Crosby—or would you rather

freshen up first?"

"No-thank you-" Barbara was trying to turn those misty memories into something definite. "I mustn't be long. My bus leaves the village at five and if I don't catch it I lose my train to London."

"You've come a long way to deliver I glance.

handsome chap with the golden hair is, that message," Robert Soames said in his deep voice. "If you'd rather be alone with Denise, us men can clear off."

"Oh no-it's nothing personal," she told him hurriedly. "In fact, I hardly know what it is. You see, I've recently lost my mother, and among her effects I found this note, together with a key."

She handed the note over, and as the blonde scanned it her slim brows arched. Without comment she passed it to Robert Soames, who examined it with a lawyer's thoroughness before giving it to Julian Baxter, who read it aloud.

"A bit far-fetched, isn't it, Miss Crosby?" he asked. "What do you expect to find-a box stuffed with money or jewels, to be handed over to

you?"

She coloured hotly, resenting his

"I don't expect anything."

"Then why come?"

"Stop bullying her, Julian!" Denise scolded. "If anyone left me a note like that I'd jolly well have to find out what it meant. You're a suspicious brute!" In spite of this, Barbara saw. her give him the soft, caressing glance of a girl in love.

"Well, it's an impossible story—" "I don't see why," the blonde broke in. "What do you make of it, Robert? It conveys nothing to me, but your firm has been handling Temperley

affairs for generations."

"I'm in the dark as well," the lawyer admitted, "and I was in Mrs. Temperley's confidence, Miss Crosby, as my father was before me. She was a most charming lady, but not the sort who could keep a secret. She never mentioned your name and I found no reference to you or your mother among her papers."

"So someone seems to be playing a joke on you, Miss Crosby," the other

man said.

Barbara flashed him a scathing

"My mother never played jokes, Mr. Baxter, and I take this seriously or I shouldn't have come a hundred miles to carry out what seemed to me to be her last wish. But as it seems to amuse

She stood up.

"Sit down, Miss Crosby, and don't take offence if we seem to be a little mystified," the lawyer said mildly, assure you that I don't regard this as a joke-" He had been reading the note again. "In fact, the phrase 'If anything happens to me' reads ominously as if your mother was expecting something unpleasant to happen. don't wish to worry you, but-was she afraid of anything?"

The question startled Barbara.

"Yes-I think she was. She never told me why, but we were always moving on, as if she was afraid we were being followed."

"How did she die?"

Again Barbara was shaken.

"While out shopping she slipped on some stone steps. No one saw the accident. The coroner said the steps were mossy and dangerous-"

"You had no suspicion of anything

wrong?"

"Of course not! We had no enemies. No friends either come to

She broke off sharply as the door opened and the housekeeper brought tea in.

CHAPTER 2

A Man To Hate Or Love

"WE'LL ask Mrs. Padgett!" Denise said at once. "She was with my Aunt Georgina-oh, ever since she came to Craven Court as a bride.'

apple-cheeked little woman

beamed at them.

"And a lovely bride she made, miss."

"Do you remember her ever mentioning a Mrs. Crosby?"

"Mary Crosby," Barbara added. "My mother."

The housekeeper crinkled her brow

thoughtfully.

"Crosby-Mary Crosby. It's nigh on a score of years ago, but-yes, I believe she was one of Mrs. Temperley's closest friends. A quiet, dark lady who kept herself to herself-"

"That was Mother!" Barbara waited

breathlessly.

"That's all I can remember, miss, but Padgett may recall her. A wonderful memory, he has."

"Send him in," Denise ordered.

Mr. Padgett, also plump and rosy, could only echo what his wife had said.

It shed no further light on the note that had brought her to Craven Court. Barbara thought, disappointed, Georgina Temperley, the one person who could have solved the mystery was dead. No one else knew anything about it, so there was no point in staying.

"You've been very kind-" she

began.

"You can't go!" Denise cried. "Now we've established that your mother and my aunt were great friends. you must stay for a few days and help us to hunt for that box. It'll be fun, and—I hate leaving things in the air.' Robert Soames supported her.

"Stay if you can, Miss Crosby. This house is filled with the junk of generations, and we may find something."

"I can loan you whatever clothes you want," Denise offered generously. "You'd be doing me a favour, Barbara, because I've been starved of feminine company. I want to talk clothes, not forms, fertilisers, and farmyards."

"I've brought a sheaf of forms for you to sign," the lawyer said smiling,

and Denise jumped up.

"You'll stay, won't you?"
"Of course she will," Julian Baxter drawled. "Go and sign your forms and leave her to me."

He closed the door on them, and

came back to Barbara.

"Well, what would you like to talk about?"

"You can tell me why you were so

sure I'd stay."

He leaned against the mantelshelf and looked down at her, his gaze both critical and appraising.

"You're a very pretty girl."

She flushed. "Will you answer my

question?"

"I was wondering why you did this sort of thing for a living, when with your looks you ought to be able to marry some poor mug with money."

She felt as if he had slapped her face. "What sort of thing?" she gasped.

"I suppose it could be called a confidence trick. Denise recently came into a large fortune from her aunt, and Robert Soames and I have practically a full-time job keeping the wolves at bay. You, my pretty little Barbara, are a she-wolf."

"I don't know what you mean!"

"I'm telling you!" His voice grated.
"You come to this house with a preposterous story about a message left
by your dead mother who—by sheer
coincidence, of course—was Georgina
Temperley's closest friend."

"I didn't say that," Barbara protested. "The housekeeper did!"

"Naturally you found out who the late Georgina's friends were and which had conveniently died, so that you could come to Denise with some yarn that would make her receive you with open arms—and open cheque book."

Barbara jumped up, wide-eyed with

anger.

"Are you daring to suggest that

"I am." His voice cut into hers.
"I've tumbled to your little game, and I suggest that you clear off before I call the police. I'll tell Denise you've remembered another engagement."

Barbara would have given anything to be able to walk out of the house, but—she couldn't. If she did, this insufferable young man would think that his appalling insults were true.

She faced him, blue fire sparking in her eyes.

"I am not going! I shall stay here and prove you the liar you are!"

The man stared at her, scowling.

"No one calls me a liar-"

"I do!"

Her defiance disconcerted him, but he recovered.

"In that case one or other of us is going to apologise before you do leave," he said grimly. "I'm not usually rude except when the circumstances call for it."

The girl was dangerously near to tears because she hated him—and yet knew she could love him. Julian Baxter was something new to her, something wildly exciting that made her long for them to know and understand one another.

"You're despicable," she said coldly—but she wished he would take her into his arms and kiss her, again and

again.

Across the passage, Robert Soames had shut Denise and himself in the book-lined study.

"We can trust Julian to look after her for half-an-hour." He spoke mildly. "He can't resist a pretty face—can he?"

Denise looked at him, her green eyes

dinting.

"Who is she, Robert? Do you

think——

"You know perfectly well that she's Georgina Temperley's daughter. She's the missing heiress who could take away everything you've inherited—if she found out who she was."

"I can't believe it!"

He helped himself to a cigarette

from a jade box on the desk.

"My dear girl, there isn't a doubt. I told you, before your aunt died, that she had instructed me to try to find her child, if still alive. All she could tell me was that Mary Crosby was the fostermother's name and that Barbara

Temperley had probably taken it. She gave me no explanations. She merely told me to find the girl."

"And you didn't!"

"I didn't try," he agreed, smiling slowly, "because I was too much in love with you. I knew your aunt was dying, knew she was postponing making her will until she had news of her daughter. It didn't come, so she died intestate—and the money came to you, as the only relative."

The girl jumped up in a flurry of

agitation.

"And now I've got to lose the money, this house—everything—to a stranger who doesn't even know who she is! Robert, need we tell her?

Can't we send her away?"

"To follow up other clues her fostermother may have left? No, we can't risk that. If you were left a message like that you wouldn't rest until you knew what was behind it, and nor will she. It's up to us to keep her from discovering that she is Barbara Temperley."

"And if she finds out?"

The man took a book from one of

the shelves.

"This is the law of testacy, and it's pretty complicated. We know that Georgina was her mother, and Hugh Temperley her father, because Georgina told me so. But why did she farm the child out to a fostermother? The Temperleys were wealthy landowners—just the sort who want children to carry on the family tradition. Of course, she might be illegitimate."

Denise stared at him.

"How could she be? My aunt was

Hugh Temperley's wife!"

"I know, but they could have married after the child was born, and as the law stands the subsequent marriage of the parents doesn't make the child legitimate. That's a vital point, because unless a child is legitimate, it has no claim in law. Got it?"

"I could still keep what I've got?"

He nodded. "It's possible, but don't count on it—we can't be sure of anything until we know the whole truth. I think it more likely that she is the legitimate heiress, or her fostermother wouldn't have sent her here."

Hope faded from the girl's eyes.

"You're a lawyer—can't you be definite?" she exclaimed. "What are we going to do? You've got to help me!"

He came closer and looked down at

her.

"You said that before, when your aunt first instructed me to find the girl—remember?" he said softly. "You said you might be grateful enough to marry me—if I didn't search too hard."

"I'm—very fond of you, Robert."
He laughed at that, a soft, mirthless

sound.

"I'm sure you are—now. But your aunt died, and when months passed without anyone turning up to make a claim you thought your inheritance was safe. So what did you do? You kept me waiting and—brought Julian Baxter here."

His voice was gently reproachful. He was still smiling, but Denise looked

uneasy.

"The estate was in bad shape and Julian is a first-rate agent." She spoke defensively. "You said so yourself. He has done wonders."

"You would think that, because

you're in love with him."

Her flush made her lovelier.

"Robert, how ridiculous! I've known Julian for years, and he's just

a good friend-"

"You're in love with him," he repeated softly. "He may not realise it, but when he does I haven't a doubt that he'd find it rewarding to be in love with you. After all, you have so much to offer—beauty, a gay disposition, a large fortune. He'd be a fool not to fall, wouldn't he?"

She bit her lip.

"Why don't you say what you mean, instead of going round in circles?"

"I will. You want my help, I want a promise of marriage. A promise that you'll keep."

CHAPTER 3 The Opened Box

THE blonde looked up at the man thoughtfully, then her exquisite little face dimpled into a ravishing smile. She went to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"What an old grouch it is! You

know I adore you!"

"And Julian? He was your child-

hood sweetheart."

"I know—and I hired him as agent to make you jealous!" she murmured huskily. "You were too certain of me, and no girl likes that. Shall I tell you something, Robert? You're so clever and good-looking that I was scared. I loved you, but I thought I couldn't hold you."

"So you hired Julian?"

"He's nice, but——" She shrugged expressively.

"You mean he wouldn't fall for

you?

"He would have, if I'd tried hard enough, but I didn't. Shall I sack

him?"

"Not yet. The last agent was a hopeless slacker. And as you've already pointed out, Julian is pulling the estate together. But when he has done that he'll have to go. You can't kid me, Denise."

"Who would try?"

As she stood on tiptoe to brush his lips with hers, a sudden passion shook the man. He snatched her to him so savagely that she gave a little cry that was smothered by his lips.

His kisses hurt, but he had no mercy on her. For months she had kept just out of his reach, mocking, laughing, leading him on and then rebuffing him. She knew he was mad about her and, treacherous and unpredictable, had kept him waiting for the reward he had earned. Now, thanks to the arrival of

another girl, she was in a state of panic.

She would have to pay for his help. Denise clung to him, her lips as sweet as honey. Her creamy lids hid her eyes. It was easy for her to pretend that these were the kisses of another man—a man she meant to win.

"What shall we do, darling, about that nuisance of a girl?" she

whispered.

"Before we do anything, we must find the box mentioned in that note, if we have to tear the house apart. It must be somewhere here and it's too dangerous to leave about. What did you do with your aunt's personal stuff?"

"Dumped most of it in the attics."
"Then that's where we'll start looking—later. Kiss me again and try to pretend that you mean it."

"I do, Robert. I do!"

Shown to her room by Mrs. Padgett, Barbara knew she had slept here before, as a child. In the morning the light would pour through an east window that looked across meadows to a dark green wood—

"Yes, miss, I remember your mother bringing you with her several times." Mrs. Padgett answered her question. "But you were only a baby. We put

a cot up for you."

"Is this Mrs. Temperley?" Barbara stared up at a portrait on the wall.

"It is, miss, but how would you know that?" The housekeeper sounded surprised. "It was painted by her main-law, Mr. Hugh's mother. They were very fond of her, his parents were—treated her like a real daughter after he was killed in the war."

"My father was killed in the war as

well," Barbara brooded.

"Many were, miss. I've put some of Miss Denise's things out for you. Is there anything else?"

Barbara said there wasn't. She undressed and stood gazing up at the

portrait of the woman who had been her mother's friend. Georgina Temperley was dark and pretty. She was smiling, but there was sadness in the blue eyes, indecision and weakness in the gentle mouth.

A woman, Barbara thought, who wanted to do what was right but seldom did. A confused, unhappy woman, who looked as if she wished she had someone to confide in.

"We could have been friends," the girl thought, aloud. "We could have

talked.

In bed, she reviewed this exciting day, not sure that she had made any progress in solving the puzzle her mother had left. Nor could she decide whether she was sorry or glad that she

had come to Craven Court.

She liked Denise Temperley. There was something audacious about a pretty girl who made no bones about having two handsome men on the premises—Julian Baxter and Robert Soames both had rooms in one of the wings of the big old house.

She admired Robert Soames. Apart from his amazing good looks, he seemed kind and clever—far more capable of understanding a problem

than the younger man.

Were both of them in love with

Denise?

Barbara thought it more than possible. Denise was lovely, wealthy, vivacious—

A pang of envy touched her heart. She had so little, compared with the other girl. What chance had she, if Julian Baxter had fallen for the glamorous blonde who employed him?

Barbara had never been in love before—had never imagined it could

hurt like this.

It was rather dreadful to think that, at the age of nineteen, she had never been kissed by a man. It wasn't their fault—or hers. Many had be en interested and some had been nice, but before any romance could start she and her mother had moved on.

Julian had wanted her to leave Craven Court. He had mistaken her for an adventuress and been insulting. Yet behind it she had sensed that he was interested in her—

She sighed and tried to sleep, but the old house seemed full of noises. In the attics there were queer, dragging sounds, and once she thought she heard

voices.

Then she dozed off and dreamed that someone had come into the room, looked at her, and gone out again, quietly closing the door.

"This could be it!"

Robert Soames came down the narrow stairs leading to the attics with the box in his hands. It was japanned black and gold—the sort of box given as a present at Christmas, in which to keep valued odds and ends.

"I found it on the shelves, covered with dust," he said. "It's locked."

"Break it open!" Denise was flushed with excitement.

"I don't want to do that. The key is in her handbag. Can you get it without waking her?"

Denise nodded. A minute later she joined him in the study with the key

in her hand.

"Easy as pie. Quick, Robert! Does it fit?"

The key turned in the little lock. There was a puff of dust as he opened the lid.

"Papers." He took them out, unfolding them one by one.

On top was Barbara's birth certificate, giving February 1940 as the date of her birth, with Georgina Laker and Hugh Temperley as the parents. Then came their marriage certificate—dated six months later!—and then a letter to Barbara in Georgina Temperley's delicate, sloping writing, dated 1950.

"These papers, Barbara, will tell you who you are. Please, dear, don't judge

me too harshly, until you have read our story. Your father and I were very

much in love.

"I was his father's secretary at Craven Court, and soon after the war started I knew you were on the way. Hugh—your father—was a Territorial, called up the very first day, and sent to France a week later. We had no opportunity to marry, so I went to my best friend, Mary Crosby, to have you in secret.

"Your father survived Dunkirk and we were married as soon as he came on leave, but by then it wasn't possible for us to produce a daughter several months old. The scandal would have hurt his people more than us and—we were both very fond of them. So we decided that we must let Mary Crosby take care of you, Barbara, until after the war. Please believe me, neither of us wanted it—it was to save other people a lot of pain. We did not intend that you should lose anything, and to make sure of that, we legally adopted you—"

Robert gave a whistle of dismay.

"That does it! That makes her the legal heiress, Denise. I was hoping they might have overlooked adoption, in the confusion of war. If they had, she'd have no claim, although she's their child—"

"Then I lose everything?"

"If she ever knows—yes. But she doesn't know—and we have the vital papers." They read on:

"We planned to emigrate to Canada after the war, taking you with us. We saw you every time he was on leave and we both loved you. He was killed, in 1943. on active service.

"Barbara, I did not know what to do. Without him I was lost. I felt I just couldn't confront the Temperleys with a grand-daughter they knew nothing about. They idolised your father, and Mary Crosby had become so fond of you that she was ready to

keep you indefinitely. You were happy. And Mary, as my friend, could bring you to Craven Court on visits, as her own daughter. It hurt me, and yet I couldn't bear to have you, Barbara dear, because you reminded me of my loss. I loved your father so dearly.

"His parents died and I came into the Temperley estate. By then I wanted you, Barbara, but Mary refused to part. She wrote a bitter letter saying I didn't deserve you. Perhaps she was right—I don't know. I only wanted to do what was best for everyone. I answered her, pointing out that with me you would have everything. She wrote again, just a few lines enclosing the birth and marriage certificates I had given her to mind—"

Robert took another paper from the japanned box.

"Here is the Crosby woman's letter."
He read aloud:

"'Put these in the japanned box I gave you. If Barbara ever comes to you, which I hope she never will, you must tell her everything."

"And she's here!" Denise breathed.
"Mary Crosby sent her!"

The man nodded; they turned again to Georgina Temperley's letter and read on in silence.

"I tried to find you, Barbara, but Mary had taken you away, and she evaded every effort I made to have you traced. I don't even know if you are still alive, but in case you ever come to me and I'm not here, I am putting the certificates and this letter in the japanned box, as Mary said. It has two keys and we each have one, because when we were young we shared our secrets.

"Don't judge me too harshly, dear daughter. I could have gone on searching for you, but would it have been fair to take you from Mary after all those years? I have a little niece—she

is your cousin—and I shall have her to live with me so that I won't be too

lonely."

"That's me," Denise said angrily.
"I'm the little niece—just someone to keep her company. And what do I get for all those wasted years? Or even for changing my name from Laker to Temperley? Nothing!"

"You've got everything," the man reminded her, "and I promised you that you should keep it. That's part of our

bargain."

She rushed into his arms, feverishly eager for the kisses that sealed her future.

"You mean that?"

"I do." After a few moments he drew away from her, reluctantly. "Put that key back in her bag and go to bed. I've work to do."

CHAPTER 4 Fear Steps In

TULIAN was scornful.

"This idea of a treasure hunt is screwy. I don't know why I've let myself be roped in for it. What are, we supposed to be looking for, anyway?"

"A box," Robert told him. "Any strongish box, I suppose. We'll start from the attics and work downwards. You take Barbara with you, Julian, I'll

take Denise."

They parted at the fork of the stairs. "You've got a lot to answer for," Julian growled at Barbara. "You won't look so fresh and neat when we come down—you'll be covered with cobwebs and dust."

The light in the attics was so dim that at first Barbara could hardly see. As he had said, there were cobwebs everywhere. The place was littered with old-fashioned pieces of furniture, rolls of worn carpet, pictures in great gilt frames.

"Don't disturb the mice," Julian

warned.

"Are there any?" She hated them. he took the box from her.

"Hundreds. Mice and spiders, bats and rats-"

Something scuffled across the floor. She gave a little scream and backed into him—felt his hands steady her.

"Had enough?"

"No. I'm going to search."

"For something that isn't there?" He turned her to him.

"Let me go!"

He laughed at her, then pulled her against him and kissed her hard on the lips. It was so unexpected that it passed through her like an electric shock. She gasped—stuttered.

"W-what was that for?"

"Call it a fee for wasting my time, and don't look at me as if I'd done something terrible. You're a clever little actress, but I'm not taken in."

Barbara's lips were tingling. She put the back of her hand to them and stared at him over it, her eyes large and frightened.

"I-hate you for that!" she whis-

pered.

"Good. I hope you hate me enough to guit Craven Court as soon as this farce of a search is over. In fact, you ought to go now."

"Not until I find that box."

"You mean you want me to kiss you again? I'm agreeable. I shall take a kiss for every minute we waste up here."

This time she backed away from him, and stumbled against a small table. Something clattered to the floor—a box japanned in black and gold.

She pounced on it, everything else forgotten in her excitement.

"This box! My mother had one exactly like it-"

"I dare say they were turned out by the million."

"I'm sure it's the box my mother wrote about, and I'm going to open it!"

But before she could use the key,

"This and whatever may be in it | dered if it was some sort of an appeal belongs to Denise."

"But my key fits!"

"I'm sure it does," he said calmly. "You're a smart girl, Barbara. When did you plant the box here?"

"Plant it?" she echoed. "Me?" "Of course. Look at it. No cob-

webs, hardly any dust."

"That's because I knocked it off the table." She drew a deep breath. "What a nasty, suspicious mind you

have!"

"I've X-ray eyes as well," he mocked. "Shall I tell you what we'll find in the box? A last request in a passable imitation of Georgina Temperley's writing, asking that a substantial sum be paid to the daughter of her old friend, Mary Crosby. Very nice, tooif you can get it." He tapped the box. "I've half a mind to open this myself and destroy whatever's in it. I don't want Denise to be bothered.'

"You said it was her property!"

"So it is. All right, let's go down and get it over." From the foot of the stairs he shouted. "Hi-vou two! We've treasure trove. Barbara nearly fell dver a locked box which she says she knows is the one."

"Barbara, how wonderful!" Denise came flying down with Robert following. "This is going to be exciting.

We'll open it in the study."

They gathered round the box.

"Better let Robert perform the opening ceremony," Denise suggested gaily. "Locked boxes should always be opened by legal men. Are you expecting lots of money, Barbara?"

"You bet she is," Julian murmured. The key clicked and Robert lifted

the lid.

"Sorry to disappoint you, but there's no treasure." He glanced sympathetically at Barbara. "Just a few old letters

"Take them out and read them!" Denise commanded.

to Georgina Temperley on her behalf. If so, Julian Baxter would think his guess was right.

Robert read aloud:

" 'Put these papers in the box I gave you. If Barbara ever comes to you, and I hope she never will, you must tell her everything. Mary.'

He glanced inquiringly at Barbara. "This is your mother's writing?

What do you make of it?"

"I don't know," she said helplessly.

"I just don't know."

"Read the others," Julian suggested. There were four of them, single sheets of yellowing paper with a few words scrawled on each in a blunt, almost brutal hand. Again they listened to Robert's deep voice:

"'I'll get you for this, Mary-and

the child as well.'

"A life sentence doesn't last for life. Some day I'll be coming for you." "If you die first, I'll get the girl."

"You can't hide from me, Mary. I know vou're on the move and as soon as I'm free I'll be coming after you."

The notes were unsigned, iapanned box contained nothing else except a blurred and faded snap of a

man in khaki.

Barbara knew that the others were gazing at her as if she had the clues to this new mystery. She made a little gesture of defeat.

"It means nothing to me. I just

don't understand-

"Try to remember," Robert urged. "These are obviously threats against your mother, and she must have told you something—something that may give us a lead."

"No—she didn't. I'm sure—"

"This photograph—have you ever seen the man before, or anyone like him?" Robert asked patiently. "Think hard, Barbara, because it's most important."

Denise glanced at him, long lashes veiling her admiration. He had found Barbara could see that the top letter the snap in an old album of the first was in her mother's writing, and won- war, and had chosen it because the soldier was just a blur. She knew he snapped, "You were the one who had sat up half the night composing those notes that Mary Crosby's genuine letter covered so neatly.

"No, I've never seen anyone like

this," Barbara was dazed.

She was beginning to think she would never learn the truth behind her mother's mysterious message? Perhaps it was just as well, for she was conscious of a queer little chill creeping round her heart-a chill that could be

Who had sent those notes? There was the threat of violence in that thick black writing-violence against her as

well as her mother!

Julian was examining the notes

carefully.

"I would say this was a hoax," he pronounced. "People who intend to kill someone don't write to the victim to say so. And the ink of Mrs. Crosby's letter looks more faded than that of the notes that must have been written before it—if you take this thing

"Her letter was covering the others, so naturally it would fade first." Robert spoke quickly. "I'm afraid I can't brush this aside as a hoax. Julian, much as I'd like to—it wouldn't be fair to Barbara. You'll remember she told us her mother kept moving for fear that she was being followed, and that Mrs. Crosby's death was most unusual—a fall from stone steps, with no witnesses."

Julian stared at him.

"You're not suggesting that she "I'm suggesting that we must take

this seriously."

"But would the police?" Julian asked. "A few unsigned notes are no proof."

"We mustn't upset Barbara," Robert interrupted tersely, "so it might be kinder if you kept your thoughts to yourself, Julian, if you've nothing constructive to say."

"I'll say what I please," the other

suggested that there was something wrong."

Barbara was trying desperately to cast her mind back to any chance remark of her mother's that might help. It was no use-they had never discussed the past. She hardly knew what she had expected from the last note-good news or bad, but certainly not this.

She was thoroughly alarmed now. As Robert had said, her mother's death had been unusual-and the notes on the table could account for it. front of her was the one that read: I'll get you for this, Mary-and the child as well.

A shiver ran through her.

CHAPTER 5

Test For A Fraud

WITH a great effort Barbara tried to shake off her fear. She saw Denise gazing at her sympathetically.

"This must be awful for you, Barbara. It's so disappointing and frightening to find that the box contains nothing, but these terrible threats. Robert, do you really believe she's in any danger? If so, we must help!"

"I've caused you too much trouble already," Barbara said nervously. "I

think I'd better go home." Denise put an arm round her.

"Home? You know you haven't had a home since your mother died," she said gently. "She was my aunt's friend, so you must be mine—and stay here with me? I'm almost as lonely as you, in spite of having these two men to look after me."

Tears came into Barbara's eyes.

"That's sweet of you, Denise, but-"

"Sweet and silly!" Julian said sharply. "Denise, you simply can't take this girl into the house without making some inquiries about her and her story!"

"Oh, don't be so unkind, Julian!"

The little blonde spoke indignantly. "If you don't trust Barbara I do-and

so does Robert!"

The lawyer nodded. "Be fair to her, Julian," he urged quietly. "She didn't say her mother knew Mrs. Temperley -the Padgetts did. She said she had come here for a box, and-we found the box. That's good enough for me. You can't say that Barbara has got anything out of it-except a bad fright."

"And the offer of a home with a

wealthy girl."

"I haven't accepted," Barbara breathed, "and you're making

impossible---"

"No, he isn't-his bark is worse than his bite," Denise said lightly. "The worst of watchdogs is that they often bark at the wrong people. If you stay, Barbara, you'll be doing me a favour -not me you."

"But I can't live here without paying," Barbara told her helplessly. "I've earned my own living for years."

"How?" Julian shot at her.

"At home I'm a shorthand-typist on call for the agencies. I never could take a regular job because we were

always moving."

"Robert or Julian must give you one!" Denise cried. "Then you can live with me, pay your way if you want to, and we can look after you. It's all settled, so we'll send for your things-"

"Not so fast," Julian growled. "Who's going to give her a job?"

"You," Robert told him. "You've been complaining about the amount of paper work you have to do when you should be out and about on the estate. so Barbara can do it for you."

Julian frowned at him.

"Don't make me laugh! She may have the right outlines, but they aren't the shorthand sort, and I bet she doesn't know a typewriter from a spindrier. Can't you see she's a girl with a new gimmick- take me in and treat me well'? You can have her, Robert." of spare parts for certain agricultural

"If I had room at my office for another typist I'd be glad to give her a trial."

"Oh, I'll give her a trial—"
Julian turned to Barbara. "But only on the understanding that I can fire you if you can't do the work."

"I agree!" Anger swept through her. "You've gone out of your way to insult me in front of two people who have been very kind to me, and I owe it to them to prove you wrong!" She cooled down a little, and looked appealingly at Denise. "May I do that? I'd like to stay. You see, if there is an ending to my story, it ought to be here-"

"What makes you think that?" She shrugged. "Intuition, I suppose. I know I've been to Craven Court before, when I was very small, and if I can stay, things may start to come back. My mother wouldn't have sent me here unless there was something I had to know-something even more important than these-

She looked at the notes on the table,

and shivered.

"You'll be safe among friends," Robert comforted. "We'll keep an

eve on you."

"Even an enemy wouldn't mind doing that," Julian said grudgingly. "That's what makes me suspicious. A girl like you would never be content with an office job."

The estate office was a two-roomed building half-a-mile from the house and on the fringe of the woods that shut the estate off from the one road that wandered near to it. Barbara arrived at ten, as Julian had ordered, and found him already busy.

"There's the notebook, there's the typewriter," he said curtly-almost before she could slip off her coat.

"Ready?"

He began dictating, a long, involved letter complaining of the non-delivery implements. It was unfair because it bristled with technical terms that must have tripped her up—if she hadn't done holiday relief typing for a manu-

facturing firm.

He sat back, grinning, as if he had done something clever, she thought angrily. Fifteen minutes later she put the letter in front of him, beautifully typed and correct down to the last

He read it through, frowning over it. She was glad to see he had gone rather

"Well, have I done typing before, or do you still say I'm an impostor?" she asked. "It was a mean trick, giving me a letter like that."

He looked up at her.

"It was," he admitted, "and I'm sorry. I thought you'd make a hopeless mess of it and prove yourself a Instead, you've made me feel fraud. pretty small."

"I'm not a girl with new

gimmick?"

"I'll take that back as well-" "And vou'll apologise—as you said

one of us must, before I left?"

"You aren't leaving and you can't expect me to go down on my knees," he protested. "I've said I'm sorry, but it's up to me to protect Denise's interests."

She wasn't going to let him off too

lightly.

"And your own. If anyone is after

her money, it could be you."

"What do you mean by that crack?" "She's very Barbara shrugged. pretty, very charming, and-very rich. I suppose you aim to marry her?"

"That's cheap—and nasty," he said

contemptuously.

"What about you?" she cried. "You called me a cheat before you knew me, forced your kiss on me, then sneered at me in front of your friends."

"We'll call it quits," he offered.

"Will we? I'm not apologising for anything I've said!"

He came to her desk and scowled down at her.

"Are you still hinting that I'm after

Denise's money?"

"It was more than a hint."

His anger exploded. "I'm not in love with her, I'm not going to marry her, and I don't want her money! that satisfy you? I don't suppose you mean what you've said-it's just a rotten way of hitting back at me!"

Barbara was beginning to enjoy the quarrel. If he wasn't in love it meant he was free to fall in love with-anyone. The thought sent a quick throb of excitement through her heart.

"You can't tell me there's nothing between you and Denise," she taunted.

"You're such a smart girl no one can tell you anything," he retorted. with heavy sarcasm. "To score off me vou drag Denise into it, imputing things you should be ashamed of if you had any sense of gratitude-"

"What's so shameful in me thinking

you two might be in love?"

"That isn't what you thought—and idiotic, anyway, I've known Denise since we were kids and we're friends. That's all."

She must have misjudged the glances that passed between them. Barbara told

herself joyfully.

"If you kiss your enemies, what do you do to your friends?" she wanted

to know.

"In Denise's case I chased her all over the estate—with a tomahawk. I was going to scalp her, but I believe I kissed her instead, so it must be a bad habit,"

"You must have been a horrible

little boy!"

His mouth suddenly relaxed in a

grin.

"I probably was. Then I went away to school, took my degree in estate management, and I didn't see much of her until her aunt died, when she offered me the job here." He frowned "I won't have anything said against her-by you or anyone else."

"I should think not!" Barbara cried.)

"She's wonderful!"

"At last we agree about something. Now-can we stop being rude to one another and get on with the work?" "I get the job?"

"You've passed the efficiency test and, believe me, I can use some help.

Office work! How I hate it!"

For an hour he dictated at top speed, then left her to get on with it.

CHAPTER 6

Through A Dark Wood

AT lunch-time Denise came along with sandwiches and fruit.

"If I know Julian, he won't let you out for lunch," she laughed. "Don't let him drive you too hard, Barbara -he can be a real tyrant. Going to like it?"

"I-think so, and I want to thank

you, Denise.'

"Don't," the blonde implored, "or I'll start sprouting wings, which wouldn't suit me. Wait till you see me in what Julian calls 'one of those moods'. I can be a real devil, even to my friends."

"I'll believe that when I see it,"

Barbara said lovally.

"What do you think of Julian?" The question brought colour to Barbara's cheeks.

"Well, you heard what he said about me-but I suppose I'll have to overlook it as he's your watchdog,"

Denise smiled. "So is Robert. He never barks, but if he bit-I think it would hurt. What do you think of him?"

"He's the handsomest man I've ever seen and I like him very much."

The blonde laughed.

"Careful, or you'll be falling for Most girls do. See you later."

She drove off, leaving Barbara wondering again—whether the lovely little blonde was interested in Julian. not, why did that strange glow come into her green eyes when she men-

tioned him? She had spoken of Robert as well, but something had been missing from her voice,

Julian might deny love, but did he know of Denise's feelings? could be in love without the man suspecting—she herself was an example of

It was frightening, this crazy infatuation for a man she hadn't known existed until yesterday, almost as frightening as the hint of danger that had driven her to shelter where she would be with him.

Was that why she had accepted

Denise's offer?

For a girl who had never been in love before, she was making up for lost time with a vengeance, falling for a man so swiftly that she was already impatient to see him again.

She finished her sandwiches and stood at the door, eating an apple. The afternoon was warm, the air scented and hazed by wood smoke. Across the lush green meadows the old house had

mellowed into gold.

It would be a good place to live in. she mused—and to love in. Perhaps that was why she had been guided here.

She lingered for a few moments. dreaming that Julian was kissing her again, not in mockery, but with the tenderness of love on his lips.

Sighing, she went in to work,

Julian came back as she was making a cup of tea.

"Hi, how about my letters!"

"On your desk, all finished." Her heart was beating more quickly at the sound of his voice.

"Good. I'll have a cup of that, and when I've signed them you can dash off to the post. It goes early, from the box on the road. Know the way?"

"I can find it."

"Follow the path through the woods and it'll bring you out within fifty yards. Come back here, and I'll tell you what I want you to do to-morrow."

them, and went out to post them. The sun was already setting, and a thin

mist made the woods chilly.

She posted the letters and came back in a silence that made her feel as if she were walking on tiptoe. The mist had thickened a little and the path between the trees seemed to get lost in it, cutting her off from the rest of the world.

It was silly to be nervous, but she had been jumpy ever since finding that box in the attics. Anyone might be hiding among those trees—even the mysterious enemy who had wished to harm her and her mother. She had a sudden prickly feeling that she was being spied on.

She began to hurry.

Simultaneously there was a whine, a bang, and something buried itself in the trunk of a tree a few inches from

her head.

Terrified, she darted from the path and dodged round one tree, then another. It was dark in the woods, but the trees gave her cover as she rushed on, stumbling over the roots until the misty light ahead told her she was nearing the office.

She reached it, panting, just as Julian came from it with a doublebarrelled gun under his arm.

stared at it-and at him.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked. "You look as if you'd seen a

ghost-

"Someone—shot at me." She gulped down her fears. "I was coming back when—it whistled past my head and smashed into a tree."

"So those poachers are at it again! I should have warned you. The last

agent was very slack."

"I didn't see or hear any birds for

them to poach," she breathed. He laughed. "You wouldn't, but they would. This is the time when the birds are settling to roost and those beggars shoot them off the branches."

"I suppose it could have been an

She sealed the letters as he signed accident." Barbara's voice shook a little. "What are you doing with that gun?"

"Rabbits also come out at sunsetand they're too costly to have on any land. You surely don't think that I-But no, of course you wouldn't! Were you really scared?"

"Yes, I was,"

"I'm sorry-I'd forgotten that you were supposed to have enemies. But you mustn't start thinking there's one lurking behind every tree.

"I don't!"

"Well, you run along to the house now," he said soothingly, "and I'll try to find whoever is poaching our woods,"

As she left him she heard him walk away, towards the woods, and she found herself wondering if he had been there with his gun, waiting for her to pass.

But, she couldn't see him as an enemy, in spite of the way he had treated her. Poachers were the most logical explanation, and she wouldn't have given the incident thought, but for those notes.

She was glad to reach the house. The hall was in darkness, but there was a light under the door of the larger sitting-room and, opening it, she

saw Denise and Robert.

They were locked together, the girl's blonde head bent back under the man's passionate kiss. Her supple body was moulded to his, and there was an air of abandonment about the embrace that made Barbara flush and try to back out.

She was too late. Robert had

raised his head and seen her.

His handsome face flushed. was a hazy look in his deep blue eyes, as if he had been utterly lost in the passion of the moment, but he smiled at her.

"Come in, Barbara, and don't look so shocked or you'll make us feel guilty," he said cheerfully. "You can be the first to congratulate us on our

engagement. Denise has just promised; to marry me."

"Oh, how wonderful!" Barbara spoke with genuine warmth. "Denise.

I'm so pleased!"

"You look relieved as well," the other girl said, laughing, "What did you think we were up to? I'll bet

you've never been in love."

So girls could be mistaken about one another! So much for the famous feminine intuition, Barbara thought. She could have sworn that Denise was interested in Julian, but here she was, swooning under the handsome lawyer's kisses. And Denise was teasing her with never having been in love when surely it must be in her eyes, her voice, as well as in her heart!

"I've wanted her for a long while," Robert was saying, "but I've only just asked the question. You could have knocked me over when she said yes."

"What else could I say?" Denise's voice was as soft as butter, but Barbara had the impression that she wasn't quite as starry as she should have been. "You're such a fascinating man, darling, I was afraid some other girl might snap you up-Barbara perhaps."

"Barbara has other things on her mind," he said seriously. "I'm hoping that you'll be quite safe here. Barbara, but if you see or hear anything at all suspicious, at any time, you must tell

me-or Julian."

"Something has happened—" She told them about the shot in the woods. "How awful!" Denise cried. "Robert, do you think-"

He looked worried.

"Of course, Julian may be right about poachers "-he sounded doubtful-"but they know their job and surely wouldn't mistake a girl walking along the path in daylight for a bird in the tree—at least, I presume it was still daylight, Barbara, as you were going to catch the post."

She nodded, a fluttery feeling inside her. He had put her own thoughts

into words.

Julian came in.

"I suppose she's told you all about it?" he said. "No signs of a poacher, but I didn't really expect to find any. When a man makes an inexcusable mistake like that he sheers off, fast," "Can we be sure the shot was fired

by a poacher?" Robert asked.

"We can't be sure of anything—even that a shot was fired," the younger man answered. "It could be the branch of a tree cracking as they sometimes do in frosty weather. Not being used to the country Barbara wouldn't know the difference."

"But I heard the bullet slap into a

tree!" she exclaimed.

"Bullet?" He laughed. shows you were mistaken, because poachers use shot, not bullets. What do you think this is, Barbara—the Wild West? You've nothing to be afraid of here, except your own fertile imagination."

"Are you saying I invented this?" She quivered with indignation. "I'll show you where the bullet struck-"

"You do that," he said lightly,

"when we've time to waste."

"Now, Julian, don't upset her," Denise scolded. "It isn't her fault if her nerves are triggered. Mine would be, after reading those notes."

'And the best cure for nerves is champagne," Robert suggested. "We've something to celebrate, Julian my boy. Denise is going to marry me." smiled down at her, knowing by the glitter in her eyes that she was inwardly raging because he was forcing the pace in front of witnesses.

But there was nothing she could do about it. If she wanted to keep a fortune that didn't belong to her she would have to take him as well, because without his help she was lost. He meant to have her and the money -had been after both for years.

Denise had taken his hand. A sharp nail scratched across it to show him that he couldn't push her too fast, and she gave Julian a radiant smile.

"Have I broken your heart, to Julian. "Will you take me out?"
Julian?" she cooed. "I was your He shook his head. "Yesterday sweetheart long before this brute swept me off my feet."

"The poor chap didn't have a chance, if you wanted him," Julian

said ungallantly.

"Aren't you going to fight him for

"The last time I fought for you was with a bow and arrows. We both wanted the privilege of scalping you. I won, but we were called in to tea."

CHAPTER 7 Loathed Fiancé

SOON Robert brought the champagne and the agent gave the toast.

"To the lady and the lawyer-may all their troubles be settled out of court. If you two think this comes as a surprise vou're mistaken. I've been expecting it. Denise has had a queer sort of look for weeks."

"Have I? I suppose it does show, when people are in love." She was looking straight at him, Barbara

noticed.

"If it does, it can be misleading," he answered. "Believe it or not, Barbara was under the impression that you and I were the ones in love." He chuckled. and Barbara flushed with embarrassment.

"It was only a guess," she explained. "Right girl, wrong man," Robert said, smiling. "Be careful, Barbara, or you and Julian may be the next to fall. Marriage would keep him out of mis-

chief, eh, Denise?"

"Of course—that's why I'm marrying you," she cooed sweetly, and only he saw the daggers in her eyes. "Can't we have a real celebration. London?"

"To-morrow, perhaps."

"To-night!" Her voice was brittle. "Too far, and there may be ice on the roads later," Robert pointed out reasonably.

yes, to-day-no. You've put yourself out of my clutches," he grinned.

Denise suddenly flared up.

"What's wrong with all of you? Why won't anyone ever do anything I Goodness knows, you get enough out of me! It's so dull and boring. A glass of champagne doesn't make a party and I want fun. What's the use of having loads of money if one can't spend-

Mrs. Padgett looked in.

"Shall I serve dinner, Miss Denise?" "When I ring and not before! Don't come bothering me with your stupid questions!"

The housekeeper withdrew. Robert

spoke quietly.

"That was rude and unnecessary."

"Are you teaching me manners?" she sneered. "I feel like being rudeto you and everyone. This is my house, but people are always trying to tell me what I can or can't do. Julian's as bad as you, Robert. Why don't you leave me alone?"

"A good idea," Julian drawled. "Come on, Barbara, when the spoilt brat is in a mood like this she should be put in a little cage with a notice: 'This animal scratches—do

touch."

Denise glared at him. You were a beastly boy and you haven't improved! If I told of the things you tried to do-"

"Pity I didn't do them," he said,

"but I lost my tomahawk."

She flung a book at him. "Get out! I don't know why I

hired you! As for Barbara-" "That's enough, Denise." spoke firmly. He waved the others out

and closed the door on them.

"He can deal with her," Julian drawled. "That girl and her moodsworse than you and your fairy stories. A week ago she threw a plate at me, because I hadn't noticed a new dress "My cautious lover!" She turned she was wearing. As if it mattered!" "It mattered to her." Barbara wasn't going to criticise the girl who had befriended her. "I often feel like throwing things."

But she wondered at the sudden change in Denise, wondered what had

made her so angry.

* * *

Robert listened to the tirade for a few moments, then cut in, his voice so

sharp that it stopped the girl.

"Be quiet, Denise! You'll have the others wondering why you're engaged to me, if you show so plainly that you're in love with Julian."

"I'm not! I hate him!"

"Because he refused to take you

out? Don't be so childish."
"It wasn't that," she pouted sulkily.

"Then it must have been because I announced our engagement. What did you expect me to do—keep it secret so that you could back out when it suited you? It wasn't very sensible of you, losing your temper on what was supposed to be a joyful occasion."

She bit her lip and controlled herself with an effort. She was depending

on this man.

"You've got it all wrong," she said plaintively. "I was upset about that shot at Barbara. I had a feeling that you fired it, Robert."

"What if I did?"

She stared at him—not in horror, he noticed. Her immediate reaction was,

as always, to think of herself.

"I'm not being a party to any killing! It's too risky. When you said there was no reason why she should ever know that she was the heiress, I didn't realise that you meant to murder her!"

"Don't use that word!" he said tensely. "Do you think I'd have missed

if I intended to kill her?"

"Then why shoot?"

He sat down in one of the big winged chairs and pulled her on to his lap. She sat upright, looking at him

coldly—waiting for an answer to her

question.

"You little idiot, it was 10 scare her." His voice was soft. "Don't be surprised when other things happen. I've got to frighten that girl so thoroughly that when you offer to pay her fare to, say Australia, she'll jump at the chance of getting away from her enemies. Once she's out of this country, your troubles are over."

Denise brightened visibly. She re-

laxed against him.

"Think you can do it?"

"I'll do it-if you'll stop throwing

yourself at Julian."

She pinched his chin. "Perhaps I want to make you jealous because you're so darn certain you've got me where you want me."

"You can't kid me, Denise."

"I'm not trying. If you want to know which of you I love—kiss me."

There was passion on her lips, and she hoped he wouldn't guess it wasn't for him. For the time being she must play things his way, because it was essential that Barbara should be put out of her life—and Julian's. He hadn't fallen for the girl yet, but it could happen, with them together all day in that office. Robert had realised it—had insisted on her going there to work, for reasons of his own.

The girl was too pretty and Julian,

like all men, was vulnerable—

Her lips became more clinging. Her lids hid her eyes from the man who

was kissing her.

How she hated him! For months, ever since her aunt's death, she had been dodging his attempts to make her pay for his silence. He thought he had her cornered now, but as soon as Julian and her fortune were safe from Barbara she would find some way of escaping from this man.

"You wouldn't try to cheat me, would you?" he asked, as if he could

read her thoughts!

"Never!"
She brushed her lips on his, and tried

to read what was behind that handsome face which fascinated and repelled her. It was something evil, something dangerous, but she liked taking risks, was never afraid.

Hand-in-hand, they went to find the

others.

"Sorry I was such a dose of poison," she said contritely. "Excitement goes to my head like champagne on an empty tum, and I get silly. Am I forgiven?"

Julian laughed. "I'm used to you."

"It was nothing." Barbara was glad

the mood was over.

Denise called Mrs. Padgett in, for an apology that made the housekeeper beam.

"I don't mind what you say, Miss Denise. It isn't in you to hurt anyone."

It became a pleasant evening. They drove to an attractive country pub to play darts and, as Barbara had never played, Julian had to teach her, holding her hand to guide the darts. She thrilled to his touch, more in love than ever.

CHAPTER 8 A Narrow Escape

THAT night, when Barbara was undressing for bed, Mrs. Padgett came to her room with a glass of hot milk.

"I wanted to speak to you, miss, because me and Mr. Padgett have been thinking about the days when your mother was here," she explained.

Instantly Barbara was alert.

"What can you remember, Mrs. Padgett? What was my mother like in

those days?"

"A frightened lady," the house-keeper said bluntly. "That's what she was, miss, and Padgett's the same mind about it as myself. The last time she came to Craven Court it showed more than ever."

"But what was she afraid of?"

"That I don't know, miss, but Padgett says he thinks Mrs. Temperley was you were frightened—""

hiding you and your mother from someone."

Barbara thought of the menacing

"From whom?" she breathed.

The housekeeper hesitated, her rosy face shadowed, as if by unpleasant memories.

"I don't know that I should say-

even if I could."

"But I'm my mother's daughter!" Barbara cried. "I must find out who she was hiding from!"

"It would be a man, miss, wouldn't

it? A bad man-"

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, I did happen to hear Mrs. Temperley say to her father-in-law, not long before he died, that the person who was making Mary Crosby's life such a misery had been put away—for killing a man."

The listening girl shuddered.

"You-you don't know who the

killer was?"

Again the housekeeper hesitated. "It isn't for me to guess, miss, after all these years. I'm only telling you of it because Padgett says a man sentenced for life then would just about be out of prison by now. He says you ought to know and be warned—just in case."

"Thank you, Mrs. Padgett." Barbara was very pale, and the woman looked at her anxiously.

"Is there anything wrong, miss? I mean—you aren't afraid—like your mother?"

"Of course not. I've nothing to be afraid of."

The housekeeper looked relieved.

"Padgett will be right glad to hear that, miss. He's a nervous man, and it gave him a nasty shock, meeting that stranger in the woods."

"Stranger?" What stranger?"

"Didn't Mr. Robert tell you? No, I suppose he wouldn't if he thought you were frightened—"

"Go on, now you've started." The

girl's nerves had tightened.

"Well, Padgett was coming home through the woods when a man jumped out of the bracken—a thin, grey man, not at all the country type. As first Padgett thought it might be an attack—you do read such things these days—but he only asked where Craven Court was."

"Has he been here?" Barbara de-

manded tensely.

"No, miss. When Padgett told him the house was half-a-mile along the lane he just nodded and went the other way. Mr. Robert wasn't too happy about it. Said to be sure the place was properly locked at nights—as it will be, don't you fret."

The shadows of the past were reaching out for her, Barbara thought fearfully, and shivered. It was lucky that she had found friends—friends who

would protect her.

* ***

A week at Craven Court helped her to put the people who lived there into focus. Denise was gay, generous and quick-tempered, hurling insults at everyone when she was annoyed, and being great fun when she wasn't. Robert was as steady as a rock, kind and reliable, and Julian—

The girl's mind was too full of him to worry too much about the past. Nothing had happened to frighten her since her first day, and nothing more had been heard of the mysterious

stranger.

She had reached the stage when a word of praise from Julian lifted her into the clouds, and the slightest criticism cast her down. That was love, she supposed. Normally she wouldn't have cared what he said. She knew she was efficient, an acquisition to any office, because several of her former bosses had said so. She hadn't appreciated it from them, but she would like to hear it from Julian.

She watched him in the mirror above her desk as he sat with his dark head bent over the paper work he loathed. He was groaning and muttering.

"Here, Barbara, you can tackle these," he said at last. He stood up, glad to stretch himself, and dumped the forms on her desk. "You're beginning to make yourself very useful. I'll be sorry when you leave."

"Leave?" She was startled. "Who said anything about me leaving?"

"No one, but you won't want to stay here for much longer, will you? It's far too out of the way for a City girl, and you're good enough to get yourself a far better job."

"You know why I'm here," she said shortly. "Robert thinks it's safer."

"Safer from what?" Julian scoffed.
"You aren't really scared, are you? If so, I should think Craven Court was the last place you'd stay at, what with shots missing you by inches and sinister grey men lurking behind every tree trunk—"

"It may seem funny to you," she broke in hotly, "but Robert doesn't

think it is!"

"Lawyers have no sense of humour. And that reminds me, I'm supposed to be meeting him at Glebe Farm to discuss the new lease with the tenant. Can you make a copy of it for me to take?"

"It's an hour's hard work!"

"Well, get busy, and bring it when you've finished. We'll be somewhere around."

Glebe Farm was the most distant on the estate, and when Barbara arrived there at last she was lost among the maze of outbuildings. It was queer, she thought, that whenever you went to a farm there was never anyone about, although all the doors were open and farmyard noises came from every direction. Pigs grunted at her and geese pecked at her ankles.

She thought she saw someone near one of the big barns, but when she went across, whoever it was had disappeared. She looked inside; it was gloomy and sweet-smelling, and some-

thing was moving-

Suddenly the door behind her slammed. She tried to push it open again, pressed her weight against it. but it had jammed. In the darkness something moved behind her-something large and heavy.

An animal. She could hear snorting and puffing, and a jingling noise like

a chain being dragged.

As her eyes became accustomed to the gloom she saw a bull standing among the hay bales it had been nibbling. At the crash of the door it had turned and was glaring at her, redeved and angry.

In a frenzy of fear she hammered

on the door, yelling:

"Let me out! Let me out!"

Her voice seemed to annoy the bull. It gave a snorting bellow and came at her, head lowered. Her heart kicked violently. She swung away-and heard a horn rip across the door.

The bull came after her, chain dangling, rage in its eyes. It moved far faster than she expected, twisting and turning as she dodged away from The beast was driving her into a

corner-

She stumbled over a bale of hay, frantically clutched at a ladder to keep herself from falling. As the bull charged again she pulled herself up the ladder. It wobbled perilously, and she fell into a low loft, only a foot higher than the bull's head. It gored at the ladder and smashed it down, then bucked and reared in front of her, bellowing in its rage.

The barn doors were flung open. Peering over the edge of the loft, Barbara saw two men with hooked poles waiting warily. As the bull went out, splay-legged and snorting, they managed to hook their poles on to the

ring through its nose.

"C'm on, Tartar," she heard one "Who shut thee in theer?"

She was too weak with fear to call out. She had dropped the beautifullytyped copy of the lease to the floor in her flight, and the bull trampled it into the mire.

CHAPTER 9

Love Instead Of Fear

BARBARA sat on the edge of the loft, too shaken to jump-and saw Julian appear in the doorway. She managed to call his name and he came forward, peering at her in amazement.

'Barbara! What the devil-"

"The bull!" she gasped.

"They've taken it away. I came to see what all the bellowing was about. Did it scare you?" He burst out laughing. "You've certainly chosen a safe place to hide!"

"I-can't get down-" "Jump," he said impatiently.

As she dropped he caught her round the waist and held her away from him. "Nothing to be scared of! That

bull is always chained-"

"It was roaming free round the barn! And I was shut in with it!" He stared down at her white face,

saw she was nearly in tears.

"What do you mean? How could you get yourself shut in?"

"The wind must have blown the door-

"There, isn't any wind."

"Then-someone must have shut it trunk----,"

"Not another mystery!" he groaned, and she turned on him furiously.

"Do you think I'm inventing this? I've just had the worst fright of my life, being chased round a dark barn by a mad bull! If I hadn't climbed to the loft I'd have been dead by now."

"Well, you aren't-and it doesn't make sense to me. What were you and that bull doing in here, anyway?"

"It had broken loose and was nibbling the hay bales! I was looking for you, and-oh, what's the use of trying to explain? There's your copy ! of the lease-trampled into the mud.

He frowned at her.

"Is that why you're making such a fuss-because you dropped an hour's work and messed it up?"

"Oh, how dense can you be?" she

stormed.

She swung away, but he caught her. For a moment he held her, scowling down at her, then he pulled her to him and kissed her.

At the touch of his lips her fears were transmuted into a quivering joy. her heart leaped upwards—— The kiss in the attics had been an insult: but this-this could have come straight from her dreams.

Julian put her from him, almost as

quickly as he'd caught her.

"All right-that's over," he said brusquely. "You'll have to type another lease, but there's no hurry because Robert couldn't wait. we'll find out about that bull."

In the light outside she saw he was flushed. He glanced at her as if he didn't know how the kiss had happened and was accusing her of making him give it. She almost laughed—and happiness was still with her.

The farmhands couldn't account for the bull being loose, or for the barn

door shutting itself.

"It's just one of those things," Julian told her, as they started back for the office, "so don't go making a mystery of it."

She didn't answer. As they walked he kept glancing at her, annoyed because she didn't speak.

"What are you thinking about?" he

demanded at last.

"Nothing."

"That's a silly answer."

"It was a silly question. People don't tell their thoughts." She smiled at him and he looked hastily away.

A little later she stopped him.

"This is where I was shot at, and that's the tree the bullet hit."

"I told you poachers don't use bullets "

He went to the tree and examined it. She saw him take out a penknife, cut into the bark, and lever something from the trunk. He showed it to her. It was a bullet, flattened into a disc of lead by the impact.

"So it wasn't a poacher!" Fear came leaping back to her. "Someone

tried to kill me!"

He examined the bullet.

furrowed.

"I don't get it. I just don't get it at all. Why should anyone want to hurt you?"

"I don't know."

"Things don't happen without reason."

"What was the reason for me being shut in the barn with that bull?" she asked. "You read those notes we found in the box. Someone wanted to harm my mother-and me."

"But they didn't! Those notes referred to you as a child, so they must have been written years ago. If there ever was a real threat, it's over and forgotten! I don't propose to take this seriously, Barbara, because if I did—it might worry me."

"You don't take many seriously, do you?" she whispered.

He glanced at her. "Meaning the kiss?"

"That? Oh, that was nothing," she said coolly. "Having helped me down from the loft I suppose you expected something-"

"There are times when I could shake

you!" His tone was savage.

She gave a little laugh, her fear again forgotten because she knew he was going to kiss her.

It was a long, hard kiss that gradu

ally became more tender.

He lifted his head from hers.

"What do you say to that?" he challenged.

Her eyes were starry.

"It's up to you to say something Julian."

"No more apologies." He spoke phone to ask how Barbara is," she told firmly. "How would you react if I] said I loved you?"

She drew a deep breath of joy.

"Just-try."

Their lips met again. The woods seemed to shut them in a magic, sunlit world of their own. She had never been in love before, and it was wonderful-wonderful to be wanted by the man you wanted. It meant she would never be lonely again. They would share everything, give everything-

"When you came here I thought you were a smart girl trying to pull a fast one," Julian mused. discovered that you weren't smart in that sense, or fast. You were just what you seemed to be-lovely and

lovable."

"You weren't lovable-you were very rude," she said dreamily. hated you-at first."

"What made you change vour

mind?"

"I don't know. I didn't really hate you—I wanted you to kiss me. That surprised me, because-I haven't had many kisses. We never stayed in one place long enough for me to get to know people."

"Poor little girl," he murmured gently. "We must make up for that."

He kissed her again, but she broke from him, suddenly uneasy.

"What's wrong?"

"Julian, I've got a horrible feeling

we're being watched-"

He gazed round, frowning. The woods were silent. She expected him to laugh at her, but his voice was serious when he spoke,

"Can't see anyone, but from now on I'm going to take care of you, so you can stop worrying—and finish that

kiss."

CHAPTER 10 "You're A Devil"

As soon as Robert came in, Denise called him to the study.

him. "Apparently she got herself locked in a barn with the bull."

He gave her the charming, easy

smile she knew so well.

"How careless of her. Bulls can be dangerous animals. I wonder how it

happened."

'So do I. You were over there, weren't you, Robert? And if I remember rightly, their cowman owes you something for keeping him out of prison when he should have done six months for cruelty to his children.

Robert nodded. "It was useful, having the right man at the right place at the right moment," he agreed. "I thought it time the girl had another

scare."

"She might have been killed!"

"You said that before. Would you

weep?"

"I'm not being your accessory in any murder," she said definitely. "I want what I've got, but one has to draw the line somewhere."

"Supposing you let me draw it," he suggested. "I know what I'm doing. Next time it may be necessary to hurt

her-just a little, Denise.'

He slid his hands round her slender waist, felt her resistance flow against him. He smiled, showing a gleam of white teeth.

"I'd do anything for you," he murmured. "You are going to marry me,

aren't vou?"

"As soon as Barbara is out of this

country."

"Or out of this world?" he said

softly.

His fingertips felt the shiver that ran through her, and he judged it to be excitement more than fear.

"No. Robert-not that."

"Although she's a very pretty girl and Julian is bound to fall for her?"

"What if he does?" She tried to keep her voice casual. "I've told vou -you're the one I love."

"What a sweet little liar you are." "Glebe Farm has just been on the There was admiration in his voice.

"But don't worry—you'll come to love

me when we're married."

His kiss was like the man himself, smooth as silk, with a hard core of violence that told of passions carefully controlled but able to destroy.

She was chilled—and thrilled. She ran her fingers through his thick fair hair, and suddenly jerked his face away from hers. His blue eyes were serene and honest. The smile was still there.

"You're a devil, Robert," she whispered. "I read somewhere that the devil was a gentleman, but I didn't know he looked so good! Now leave me alone, I can hear Julian's car."

She broke from him and went to the window, in time to see Julian helping Barbara from the car. It made her scowl. She wanted his kisses, not Robert's, and—she was a girl who always got what she wanted.

That was why she had Craven Court

and a fortune.

She saw herself as she had been thirteen years ago—a sullen, resentful child. Ohe day her wealthy Aunt Georgina had called to take her out in her car, an elegant woman in furs, expensively perfumed. Denise had decided then and there that she was going to live with Aunt Georgina. She had sparkled—so gay, so happy and full of laughter that the rather sad woman had been enchanted.

An invitation to spend the holidays at Craven Court had followed, and that had been the thin end of the wedge she had used to open the doors to

luxury and wealth.

For years she had played the devoted niece. It had come as a terrific shock to learn from Robert, only a few months ago, that there was a daughter. No doubt Aunt Georgina would have treated her generously enough in the will, if one had been made, but making one had been postponed in the hope that the daughter would be found.

The daughter was coming in now, with Julian, and although there was a smile of welcome on Denise's lips, her

teeth were clenched. She wanted everything—the house, the lands, the money, and—Julian. Particularly Julian. The thought of losing him to anyone else while she was having to play a dangerous game with Robert, was like a thorn in her heart.

"Barbara, what's all this about a bull?" she asked. "Mrs. Taylor of

Glebe Farm rang up-"

The girl and Julian told them about it. They simulated horrified amazement, and Robert asked questions cleverly phrased to indicate that it might not be an accident.

"Did you examine the bull's chain,

Julian?"

"Yes—it wasn't broken. It could have slipped off the tethering post."

"Or someone could have slipped it off. Did you see any strangers, either of you?"

"Of course not," Julian said irritably.
"We're right off the track—why should

we see strangers?"

"The cowman at Glebe Farm told me yesterday that someone had been sleeping in one of their ricks—a gaunt grey man."

"It sounds like the man Mrs. Padgett saw!" Barbara gasped. "And, Julian—as we were coming through the woods I said I thought we were being watched——"

"There you are, then!" Robert's voice was deep with concern. "What are we going to do about it, Julian?"

"If there's anything in this, we'll have the whole estate searched tomorrow," he answered savagely. "I'd like to ask this mysterious grey man a few questions! I'm not going to have Barbara scared like this every time she goes out!"

The emphatic way he said it, the quick exchange of glances between him and the other girl, made Denise wonder if Robert's attempts to frighten their guest away were having any effect.

It would annoy him if she jumped the gun. It would serve him right!

"I don't suppose Barbara's enemies

will be hanging around for you two men to find them," she said earnestly. "You can't fight against people you don't know. Maybe her mother's idea was the right one—to keep on the move. If so, it's a mistake for her to stay here."

They stared at her-Robert sus-

piciously.

"I've a wonderful idea!" she glowed.
"I'll pay your fare to anywhere you choose, Barbara. Australia, Canada, America. What does it matter, as long as you're away from danger and able to stay away? Your enemies wouldn't follow you overseas, and in any case they wouldn't know you'd gone! Now I call that brilliant—" She turned to Robert with a bright smile. "Why didn't you think of it?"

"You have all the brains," he said blandly. He returned her smile, but his eyes were blue ice. "This sounds like a good offer to me, Barbara, and I strongly advise you to accept it."

Barbara ran to Denise and gave her

an impulsive hug.

"What a dear you are!" she exclaimed. "This is something I shall never forget. You're a wonderful friend. You, too, Robert. But I really

can't accept-"

"Pride?" Denise scoffed. "Pocket it! You can pay me back when you get a job, if you like—they pay fabulous salaries to secretaries in America. You'll feel much better without these threats hanging over your head. I'm sure Julian will agree."

"I agree that it's a most generous offer, Denise," he said warmly, "I would most certainly advise Barbara to accept, if it was necessary, but—it isn't." He looked across at Barbara.

"May I tell them?"

She flushed and nodded, her eyes

bright.

"It won't be necessary because if there is any danger it's my job to protect Barbara from it," he announced. "She and I have discovered that we're in love." "In love?" Denise cried. "When

did this happen?"

"A couple of hours ago—thanks to the bull. I won't say it actually tossed her into my arms, but she fell out of the hayloft into them."

He laughed, and so did Robert. Denise's lips parted, but no sound came from them. Discs of colour glowed on her cheeks. Suddenly she swung past them and out of the room.

There was a startled silence. "What's bitten her?" Julian asked.

Barbara felt that she would have known the answer—if Denise had not been engaged to Robert. As it was, she was puzzled and rather hurt.

"Don't worry, it's probably only another of her moods," Robert soothed. "You know what she is, Julian—if people don't go her way, they must be wrong." He reached for the other's hand. "Congratulations—you've got yourself a fine girl."

Then he turned to Barbara, and

dropped a kiss on her brow.

"An elder-brother kiss," he said pleasantly. "Are you glad you came to Craven Court, in spite of everything?"

"In spite of everything," she answered, and her eyes smiled into

Julian's.

CHAPTER 11 Invitation To Murder

To their surprise Denise came back after a few moments, a gold-

topped bottle in her hand.

"The treat's on me this time." She spoke gaily. "Open it, will you, Robert darling? Do you know, it made me feel so queer seeing Barbara so happy that I had to retire to shed a few tears."

"I misjudged you," Robert said smoothly. "You wear your heart on your sleeve—that's why I was able to collect it." The cork came out with a pop that made Barbara jump. "No need for you to be nervous, Barbara, now you have Julian to protect you."

he went on. "She's a lucky girl, isn't you—I'll get rid of Robert and take she, Denise?"

The blonde met his gaze.

"Marvellously lucky," she mured. "I was getting really worried about her, wasn't I, Robert? I'm not worrying any more."
"You mean that?" he asked.

"Of course. Now she has Julian, I

just won't worry."

It was an invitation to murder. Robert knew it and he smiled at her, amused by this sudden change of heart. He had no illusions about his fiancée and her pretence of loving him. She thought that by killing Barbara he would set Julian free again.

It might not happen the way she expected, but he would see to it that she wasn't too disappointed—she would have him, and he would have the

money.

"There must be romance in the air," he murmured, raising his glass. "Here's to a double wedding in the very near

future."

"We haven't bought the engagement ring yet," Julian told him, "so to-morrow we shall take the afternoon off and go shopping at Sandstone. It's a dreary place, but there are some decent shops and I haven't time to take Barbara to London."

"That's where I'm taking Denise to-morrow," Robert said ignoring her glance of surprise. keeps asking for a night out, and it's coming to her. We shan't be home until the early hours-if then."

Denise went to him and kissed him. "But should we leave these

alone?"

"The Padgetts will keep an eye on them. Mrs. Padgett loves a romance." Denise laughed. "So do I-and I

haven't kissed the happy couple— She touched Barbara's cheek with her lips, then went to Julian and put

her arms round his neck.

"My childhood sweetheart," she cooed, clinging to him, "Barbara's a honey, and if she doesn't look after piercing the blackness of a rainy night

you back! There-doesn't that deserve a kiss?"

They all laughed. A few moments later, Julian freed himself. He was

rather flushed.

"Take this fireball away from me,

Robert! I'm all burnt up.'

"You've been too close to an old flame," Robert quipped.

He said he had some papers for Denise to sign, and took her off,

"Why did you do it?" he asked.

"What-kiss him?"

"Interfere in my plans for getting rid of the girl?"

"I only wanted to help."

"I don't like being helped. Do you understand?"

She looked into his eyes, and laughed

at him.

"I'm not afraid of you, Robert, or anything else."

He knew it, but he meant her to be

quite soon.

That's why we get on so well, darling," he said mildly.

Sandstone, a sleepy seaside town, had nothing to offer on a wet afternoon when, they discovered, the shops were closed. The engagement ring could not be bought, but Barbara had never enjoyed an outing so much.

She and Julian did some windowshopping, then staggered along the beach in the teeth of an icy wind, laughing, shouting, coming together for

salty kisses.

They had tea at a cottage miles along the coast, and dined at Sandstone's one big hotel. Then, as there were no other attractions, Julian took her to a half-a-crown dance in a dimly-lit hall where they moved dreamily round with other couples in love, happy to be together in an enchanted world of their

It was late when they started back for Craven Court, the headlights that made the inside of the car seem I a warm haven.

Barbara snuggled against Julian,

relaxed and happy.

"I like Sandstone," she said blissfully. "I shall always remember our first day out. Have you been there before?"

"Once, in my schooldays."

"With Denise?"

He glanced at her in surprise.

"Yes. I believe it was. Her aunt took us, but-how would you know?"

"Just a guess. She's—fond of you, isn't she, Julian?"

"Oh, we've always been good pals." He spoke off-handedly. "Now, which road do I take? Ah-ten miles to Elswich, so we'll be home before midnight."

Barbara wondered if he was dodging

her questions.

"Do you think she's in love with

Robert?" she probed.

"What a question! She wouldn't be engaged to him if she weren't, would she? Why the sudden interest in her,

anyway?"

"It seems odd that she should have known you for more years than I have days. I'm surprised that she didn't fall in love with you-really in love. I mean."

He grinned. "The longer you know me, darling, the worse I get. I'm by

no means irresistible."

"Only to me,"

"If you say things like that I shall have to stop the car and kiss you," he said severely, "and I'd better not do that at the moment, because I'm blessed if I know where we are. think we turn right-

"No-not right! There's a sign

ahead---"

It was a Danger-No Road sign across the right-hand turning, Julian swung the car into the left fork.

"This confounded rain makes it difficult to see, but I could have sworn we turned-"

There was a screeching of brakes as he stopped the car just in time, with a jerk that nearly pitched Barbara into the windscreen. In front of them she saw a gaping hole, large enough to swallow a car, and their front wheels were half off the flinty road. Another few inches-and they would have plunged into that yawning space.

"Get out, very carefully." Julian's face was white. "I think I can risk

backing——"

The car rocked, then jolted away

from the hole.

He got out and joined her in the rain, a torch in his hand. He shone the beam downwards, but it was lost in the blackness, and when he tossed a stone in, it took seconds to hit water far below.

"I've heard of this," he said, his voice not too steady. "It's the shaft of an old mine, about a quarter of a mile deep, and has been used as a rubbish tip for years. We might have been down there, if my brakes hadn't been good."

"That road sign. It's-across the

wrong turning."

He nodded. "It should be on this Someone must have moved it across the road, leaving the track to the shaft open-for us.'

"Now will you believe that there's danger?" she whispered.

He stared down at her.

"It could be boys, fooling around

"Miles from anywhere, on a wet night like this? No, Julian! Someone means to kill me, and to do it he was prepared to kill you as well!"

Julian put an arm round her, felt

her shudder against him.

"We have no proof-"

"How much proof do you need?" she cried. "I've been shot at, shut in with a bull, and now-this!" She pointed a trembling hand towards the pit. "Julian, it can't just be a series of accidents!"

"That's the trouble—it could be. We

have no proof that the shot was fired at you, or that someone slammed the door of the barn on you, or that this sign wasn't moved by stupid kids for a lark."

"Those notes to my mother prove that someone was out to harm her—

and me!"

"Anonymous notes, years old?

don't know what to make of it."

"I do." She was trembling and very upset. "I'm going to be murdered—by someone I don't know, for something

I don't know anything about."

"Darling, you mustn't talk like that! I'll get at the bottom of it all." He kissed her gently, then helped her back into the car. "Let's get home. That was one of the narrowest squeaks I've ever had, and—we mustn't let this get us down, Barbara. There must be some logical explanation."

CHAPTER 12 The Long Night

BARBARA was glad to reach Craven Court, glad the others were not back from their jaunt to London and probably wouldn't be for hours. It meant that the story of the escape from death wouldn't have to be told that night. Her head was aching and fear still crouched like a black shape in her mind.

"You go to bed," Julian said, almost as soon as they were in. "You'll be all right now. I've something to do

"What?" Her nerves alerted her.
"I can't remember whether I moved that road sign back to its right place."

"You did. I saw you."
"Well, I shan't feel easy about it unless I go back and make sure for

myself."

She caught at him, her eyes bright with apprehension.

"Julian—why are you determined to go back?"

"I shouldn't have left the spot! I ought to have made you bring the car home while I hid in the undergrowth

and waited. If this was a deliberate attempt at murder—and I can't really believe it was—someone would have come along to make sure we were down that shaft. I may be in time if I hurry."

"Julian-don't go-"

"I can take care of myself, but it's pretty obvious I can't take care of you—until I find out what's going on."

"I'll come with you!"

"You will not. If no one comes in a couple of hours, I'll be back. Don't wait up, and don't worry. I've a revolver in my rooms and I'll take it along—just in case."

She drew a sobbing breath.

"Be careful, darling. If I lost you, I'd have no one who really cared, and

—I'm frightened."

"Don't be." His lips found hers for a moment, then he went. His rooms were in a wing of the old building with a separate door to them. She saw the lights come on, but only for a few moments, then she heard his car speeding away.

Slowly she went up to her room, oppressed by her fears and the know-ledge that his love for her had already brought him near to sharing her fate. In her mind she could still see that black, gaping pit, still hear the screech-

ing of brakes.

She shivered, unwilling to go to bed, knowing she would probably lie awake and listen for him to come back. Supposing he didn't? Supposing—

A tap at the door startled her.

"I know you like your hot drink,

miss."

Mrs. Padgett came in, plumper and rosier than ever in a quilted pink dressing-gown, a glass of hot milk and two biscuits on a silver tray.

As always, Barbara was touched by

any kindness to her.

"Oh, Mrs. Padgett, you shouldn't have waited up! It's past midnight

"We couldn't rest, miss—not until we knew you were safely back."

"Safely back? What do you mean,

Mrs. Padgett?"

"We've seen him again, miss-the thin grey man. 'Twas just at dusk, when me and Padgett were coming home from Elswich market. There he was, propping up that gate at the road end of Glebe Farm lane. Having Padgett with me, I spoke sharp. asked him who he was and what he wanted!"

"What did he say?"

"He just looked at me-and I've never seen such eyes, miss. They had a queer sort of glitter in them, as if he wasn't quite all there. I told him I'd fetch the police if he didn't move on. Then he said, 'It's a free country, isn't it?' and I said, 'That depends on what you do.' He gave a sneering sort of laugh that sent shivers down my spine, then Padgett was pulling at my arm to go on."

"Is-that all?" Barbara breathed.

"No. I thought of a few more things to tell him, but what with arguing with Padgett, he'd gone by the time I turned. I said he was probably hiding in the woods, waiting to pounce on us, but Padgett said no, he was on the Sandstone bus, which happened to be passing."

That was the way she and Julian had come, Barbara remembered. The man could have got off the bus just near the road leading to the mine shaft.

"So he may have gone," the housekeeper added, "but I thought I saw him just now, passing the window as I came to see if you were in, but Padgett says no, it was Mr. Julian going to his rooms. I tell you, miss, I'm all of a dither."

"It-must have been Mr. Julian." Barbara didn't wish to add to the woman's fright, "We'll tell him about the grey man, in the morning."

"Yes, miss. Good-night, miss. Me and Padgett are going up now, and

Something in her voice made Barbara, nothing worries him once he's snoring his head off."

Barbara saw her out and was tempted to lock herself in. Her hand was actually on the key when she told herself not to give way to nerves.

She stood at the window, sipping the hot milk and staring into the darkness. The rain had stopped and a sliver of moon kept peeping through the clouds. It peopled the lawns below with

moving grey shadows-

One of them could be the thin man. Supposing he had been watching the house, knew that Julian, Robert, and Denise were away, and that she was alone. It would be easy enough to break in, to try to succeed where he had failed three times already. would not be able to stop him from killing her. All her strength had gone and she was suddenly terribly, overwhelmingly tired.

She put the empty glass down and started to take off her green dress, but the floor seemed to slope, nearly throwing her off balance. She had to clutch at the bed-rail to steady herself.

What was happening to her? She put her hands to her cheeks and stared at herself in the wardrobe mirror. seeing a white blur of face under a mass of dark hair. Was this really her? She looked up at the portrait of Georgina Temperley and the woman appeared to rush towards her-then slowly draw away.

In those sad blue eyes there seemed to be a warning that the parted lips were trying in vain to utter. What did Georgina Temperley want to tell her? That the danger was here in this house? That she must get out at once

and try to find Julian?

Darkness seemed to creep into Barbara's mind. There was a dry taste in her mouth and she couldn't keep her eyes open, but a voice seemed to be telling her that she must not lie down and sleep, because if she did she might never wake up again.

She must go to Julian! If she could

the light on, he would see it on his way back. She would tell him about the grey man, tell him that the evil was in this house. He would help her to sweep the blackness from her mind-

She slipped from her room, closing the door noiselessly behind her. The stairs swaved a little, but she managed to stumble down them and open the

front door.

As it closed behind her the cold wind caught at her, reviving her for a few moments. She stood there, wondering what she was doing out of doors when she was tired, so tired.

Then the mists gathered again and she stumbled away from the house, knowing that fear was somewhere here in the darkness, ready to snatch at her

if she didn't hurry.

At last she reached the estate office. The door was locked, but her fingers fumbled along a ledge for the spare key Julian had told her he kept there in case he forgot his own. Inside, it was warm. She switched on the lights, and sat in Julian's chair.

She felt better—tried desperately to remember why she had come here, She had been sipping her hot milk, and then—something must have frightened her. The dry taste of fear was still in her mouth.

Julian would be cross with her for leaving the house, but it was no use going back—she had no key.

A soft tapping on the window tore at her nerves. She suddenly thought of the grey man, of Death that was pursuing her, and her throat constricted. Was she mad, coming here alone? The tapping came again, and with sobbing relief she saw a large moth, attracted by the light, banging itself against the window.

The light might also attract others her enemies. She stood up to turn it off-but if she did, Julian would pass and she would be left here all night, alone. She was afraid to go back to must be mad. Robert!

get as far as the estate office and put the house without him, but why?

Why?

Her mind began to spin again. Her eyelids felt as if weighted with lead. She was so tired—she must sleep. Whatever happened to her, she must sleep-

> CHAPTER 13 **Evil Bargain**

THE lawyer came out of the telephone box, and rejoined Denise in the car. They were on their way home from London, and he had stopped for a minute to make a call.

That girl has as many lives as a cat," he said mildly. "She ought to be dead by now, but Mrs. Padgett reports that she's in bed and fast

asleep. It's too bad."

Denise looked at him. In profile he was even better looking-like something off the plague to a poet, she thought, with that fine, wide brow and The hideous strong, manly jaw. ugliness was inside—just as because she couldn't stand ugliness. It sometimes looked out of her own eves and gave her the only twinges of fear she ever knew.

"What have you done to her?" she

asked.

"Nothing, unfortunately. But it could have happened." He was staring at the road ahead. "Supposing you suddenly saw a 'Danger-No Road' sign. Supposing you swung left-and found yourself falling down a hole aquarter of a mile deep?"

"Not the old shaft?"

"That's right. We had a look at it on our way up, if you remember."

"You said it was a danger and should be filled in, with rubble from one of the new housing estates."

"And I'd have seen that it was. On a night like this Julian should have driven her straight into it. Perhaps she has a cat's eyes, as well as its lives."

Denise's tongue slid over dry lips. "You-tried to kill Julian? No one's likely to miss Barbara, but if both of Barbara? What then? She'll take

them suddenly disappear-

"I had a good story ready. That they had vanished after I'd discovered a considerable shortage in the estate accounts."

"But why-Julian as well?"

"I should have thought the reason was obvious, my dear Denise. You still want him, and you're more likely to keep your word to me with him out of the way."

"You devil, Robert! You wicked

devil!"

He smiled serenely, as if she had

complimented him.

"Why is it more devilish to kill Julian than Barbara? You were all in favour of her being eliminated, and I thought it rather clever of me to try to kill two birds with one stone, as it were. It would suit you and me and neither of us need worry-unless we were caught."

"I've done nothing!"

"You're my accomplice," he told her. "My accessory before and after the fact. Bear that in mind if you're tempted to go to the police and have

me put out of the way."

The idea had been simmering in her mind, and when she thought of what might have happened to Julian, she hated this man as never before. she also admired his utter ruthlessness. To get her he was ready to kill two people. It might be horrifying, but it was also flattering. They were two of a kind, she and Robert, and it was the irony of Fate that she should hate him and love Julian.

"I've said I'll marry you," she breathed, "so leave Julian alone!"

"For you? I've seen the way you look at him, Denise, as if you could swallow him whole—and ask for more. It makes the prospect of you keeping your promise seem rather remotewhile he lives."

"If anything happens to him you'll

never get me!" she vowed.

"And if nothing happens

Julian, and sooner or later she'll discover who she is, and she'll take everything-strip you bare."

She gnawed at her lip, seeing another girl possessing Craven Court-

and Julian.

"She can't find out who she isunless you tell her."

"Which I might do, if you try to trick me."

"I wonder if you would! I might beprepared to tell of your three attempts at-murder!"

"And go to prison with me?"

She gave a reckless laugh. "It might be worth it, but you're bluffing when you say I'm an accessory. I haven't had foreknowledge of any of the attempts vou've made."

"The police would ask why you failed to report me to them as soon as

you did have knowledge."

"They might, but I think they'd be too grateful to me for turning you in. It comes to this, Robert-if you tell about Barbara being heiress, I tell about your attempts to kill her, and vice versa. Neither of us dares talk." "So?"

"So we're calling our bargain off,"

she replied coolly.

He stopped the car and lit a cigarette. The glow of the match made his face a golden mask.

"You don't want me to kill her?" "Not particularly," she said lightly. "Not if the price is my marriage to vou."

"Am I so—repulsive?"

She considered this. As a matter of fact, I'm attracted to you, Robert, but not in a nice way. It would be like embracing -death. I want to live—and love.'

"I could make you mine now—then

kill you."

She jeered at him, not in the least afraid. "But you won't. I'm a rare animal and any hunter who goes after my species knows they aren't of any to | value unless taken alive. You'll keep

me alive, in the hope that some day I scared of her own shadow. A few may have to eat out of your hand."

"It's possible," he conceded quietly. "But I won't do it. I'll bite your hand and you'll die of poisoning.

He tossed his cigarette out of the

window and drove on.

"Even if she doesn't get the money

she has Julian."

"I can take him from her," Denise boasted. "I could have taken him before she came, but I had to play up to you and pretend to be grateful to you for not revealing that there was an heiress. Now-you daren't.'

" All right, I daren't," he said equably, "but you won't get him."
"Why not?"

"Because you're not good enough." He smiled at her through the mirror. "You're like a golden daffodil, Denise, but not a home-grown one. You've travelled a long, long way and been handled by too many people. There's no dew on you, no freshness. You've cultivated yourself most expensively to give some man a brief pleasure, but it won't last. You're fading-"

His insults were chosen to stab into her like red-hot needles. Her one dread, as he knew, was of losing her looks. She spent hours before her mirror, days in beauty salons,

She had gone pale—almost pinched. It was as if his words had withered her. "Lies!" she hissed. "All lies!"

"The truth, Denise, Barbara walks in beauty like the night, as the poet said—but you're the garish day. There's an everlasting quality about her, as Julian realises. When she's around, he hardly looks at you. For a poor girl she's rich and you—with all her money. you're still cheap."

She struck at his face with all her strength. The car swerved across the road, but he managed to control it.

"Don't do that again," he said quite calmly. "It could cause an accident." "I'm not afraid of you!"

"That's what I find so fascinating about you. A girl like Barbara is

faked letters and she's ready to jump Too bad that it into anyone's arms. had to be Julian's."

"I tell you I can take him from

her."

"You can't. You can't get himwithout my help."

She looked at him suspiciously. "And what do you expect to get for that? I've just told you I won't-"

"Money," he interrupted crisply. "It's one of the two reasons why I wanted to marry you-the lesser reason, of course. Make it worth my while and I'll be on your side—a hired mercenary instead of an ardent lover."

"Hired to-kill?"

"If the price is right. Say forty thousand?"

"Why, that's half of She gasped.

what my aunt left!"

"Half for you, half for me. Assassins don't come cheap. You'll be the legal heiress if I get rid of the other one. It could even happen to-night."

They were getting nearer to the house, speeding through the darkness

of narrow lanes.

"How do you know I'd give you the

money?"

"I trust you in money matters, if not in others. Besides, I should kill him if you bilked. We understand one another, Denise. We're two of a pair, should you ever change your mind and want another husband."

"Don't tempt me," she mocked. "Right, Robert, it's a bargain, but don't tell me how you're going to keep your side of it. I don't want to know

what happens to her."

"You will—sooner than you expect. To-night, perhaps."

"You said she was in bed and

asleep!"

"So she is. Mrs. Padgett wisely gave her a strong sedative to counteract the shock of her escape from the big hole, and I have—certain plans. If I don't at first succeed I try, try, try again."

"You won't touch Julian?"

"He's all yours."

Her hands locked, as if to keep back the excitement that kept rising in her.

"You've blotted your copybook once

to-night-"

"With any luck you'll be blotting your cheque book before the night's out," he said complacently.

As he swung the car into the drive, Denise gave a little cry, and pointed

across the meadows.

"Look! There's a light in the estate office!"

"They must have left it on."

"Robert, oughtn't we to drive that

way and see?"

He slowed the car. A turning from the main drive led to the office a hundred yards away.

"We haven't time," he decided.
"I've something to do as soon as we

get in.'

He garaged the car, then took her

into the house.

"Go to bed as quickly and quietly as you can," he ordered. "Pleasant dreams. Do I get a kiss for letting you go?"

She laughed and yielded her lips, conscious of the passion she could rouse in this man and wishing she knew what was behind his acceptance of defeat. Then she looked into his eyes, and had to repress a shudder at what she saw in their dark depths.

CHAPTER 14 "Because I Love You!"

ONCE she had left him, Robert went through to the kitchen, where Mrs. Padgett was dozing rosily in front of the fire.

"Everything ready?"

"Yes, sir." She had wakened with a start. "I put it in her milk, and she's not likely to wake until morning."

"If then," he said, smiling. "You've done well, Mrs. Padgett, and you'll get the money I've promised, just as soon as Miss Denise is sure of it."

"Thank you, sir. Padgett doesn't

like it, but I can deal with him." Her cosy voice became charged with bitterness. "For thirty years we served the Temperleys, twenty of them with her, and what did she leave us when she died? Not a penny, not a thankyou, in spite of her promises. If Miss Denise hadn't been kind, we'd have been turned out—"

"By her daughter. It's a monstrous injustice, Mrs. Padgett, after all you've' done, and we're going to put it right. Go to bed now and don't let anything disturb you. Padgett sleeps well?"

"Since he's taken to the whisky, sir."

"See he has plenty."

Robert mixed himself a drink, then turned out all the lights. He went silently up the stairs, and stopped at the door of Barbara's room. Opening it a few inches, he took the key from the inside and locked the door from the outside.

Smiling, he switched on a light in the passage. At one time this switch had controlled two lights, but the flex to the second had been badly frayed. It ran under the floorboards of Barbara's room. It would soon spark off the fire-raising shavings and petrol-soaked rags he had packed round the flex—just in case the shaft hadn't claimed its victims.

For two hours Julian had waited near the road sign, but no one had come, no car had passed along the lonely road. Now he was driving back to Craven Court, cold and tired and —very worried.

Was the threat of danger real, or was it something Barbara's imagination had conjured up, reasonably enough, from several inexplicable accidents?

Who would want to harm her. Her mother's letter was at the back of the mystery, and to understand what was

mystery, and to understand what was going on, more should be known about Mary Crosby. He would have some inquiries made—

As he turned into the drive he saw office. The air, sharp with frost, rethe light in the estate office. It startled him. He could almost swear it hadn't been on when he drove out, and that meant someone was there. Someone who shouldn't be?

He thought of the thin grey stranger the Padgetts had told Barbara about, and hoped it might be him. A talk with that man might solve a lot of

problems!

Leaving the car. Julian walked swiftly across the grass to the office. It seemed to be empty, but filing

cabinets obscured his view.

He crept on, to the door-and was surprised to find the key in it. Only he and Barbara knew where the spare kev was kept-

He went in, and saw her. She was curled up in the one big leather chair,

fast asleep!

"Barbara!" He strode across and shook her. "Barbara, what on earth are you doing here? Wake up!"

When she didn't move, he shook her again, gently. Her blue eyes opened and she peered at him mistily.

"Oh, Julian—it's you—"
She gave him a fleeting smile and

fell fast asleep again.

Alarmed, he lifted her to her feet. "Barbara—darling—you've got to

wake up!"

She nestled against him, her dark head on his shoulder, and gave a deep sigh. She looked so young, so lovely, that he had to kiss her parted lips.

"I'm so tired," she muttered drowsily. "Where are we, Julian?"

"In the estate office. What brought you here? It's after two o'clock!"

"I-don't know." She shook her head as if to clear it. "I was waiting for you. I had-to see you-"

"But why? Try to think!"

The effort was too much for her. He saw her lashes flicker as if her evelids were too heavy.

Switching off the lights he swept her into his arms and carried her from the

vived her. He felt her stiffen.

"Julian! What was I doing there?" "That's what I want you to tell me,"

he said tensely.

She pressed her hands to her temples. "I was afraid," she whispered. "I don't know why. I was just going to bed after having a hot drink when everything seemed to rush away from me. I couldn't walk straight or think straight. All I knew was that I had to find you, so-I must have walked out."

He held her closer and tried to

soothe her.

"You mustn't let this upset you, Barbara. It's the after-effects of our narrow escape. Naturally you were badly shaken, and it was just unlucky that it hit you when you were alone." "My mouth is dry and my head

Her voice shook a little. "What's happening to me, Julian?"

"Nothing! You're just

wrought,"

"It's more than that. I remember having the feeling that I was in some terrible new danger which could destroy both of us-"

"Darling, it was a nightmare. You must have dozed, and I'm going to get you back to bed as soon as I can. In the morning we'll call the doctor-" "I'm not ill! Why should I need a

doctor?"

"You may need treatment for shock." He spoke calmly, but was more worried than ever. From her behaviour to-night quite clearly something serious was wrong.

He kissed her tenderly and she clung to him, sobbing a little; then they started walking across the turf that separated the office from the house.

Suddenly she clutched at his arm, made him draw back against one of the small trees that dotted the parkland.

"There's a light—in my bedroom!" He stared across at the house where one window glowed golden, like an eve peering through the darkness.

"You must have left it on-"

"I didn't. I know I turned it off,

and that I shut the door!"

"Darling, would you remember—"
"I tell you I do! I left the room in darkness, and now there's a light—a moving light. Look, Julian—it must be someone with a torch."

He also had noticed that the light

flickered.

"It's odd," he muttered. "Wha

would anyone be doing-"

"Looking for me!" She trembled violently against him. "Looking for me, to kill me while I sleep!"

"We'll soon find out!"

But she caught at him as he moved

forward.

"No, Julian, don't go in! I'm frightened. You were nearly killed to-night because of me, and—there's denger in that room!"

danger in that room!"

"I'll share your danger," he said grimly. "You can't stop me from doing that, because—I love you! Whatever the danger is, we'll share it and beat it!"

The light in the window vanished, then suddenly flared—red and lurid. "It's a fire!" he cried. "Your room's

on fire!"

He seized her hand and they ran to the house. Inside, there was no smell of burning, but it came to them as they reached the stairs.

The door of her room was locked, with the key on the outside. Julian shot her a questioning glance.

"No—I didn't lock it." she panted.

"Why should I?"

As he opened the door they saw the glare of flames. He shut it, quickly, and raced along the passage for the fire extinguisher from the far wall.

"Lucky Robert insisted on buying

these."

This time as he opened the door Barbara saw that the bed itself was alight and the floorboards blazing. In a few moments white foam from the extinguisher was smothering the flames.

"Fetch Robert! I think we can

handle this."

She swayed out, choking. Denise, slim and lovely in a filmy blue négligée, was rushing from her room.

"I can smell burning!"

"It's a fire—in my room——"
"How did it happen?" The blonde

looked terrified.

"I don't know. I've got to fetch Robert—"

"Robert? Why?"

"To help Julian-"

Robert appeared at that moment, and seemed to take in the situation at a glance. He hurried past them to Barbara's room, and a few minutes later the two men appeared, smokeblackened, but triumphant.

"All over," Julian said hoarsely.
"The room's a wreck, but the whole house might have gone up. Let's go down and have a drink—I can do with

one!"

CHAPTER 15

New Plan

THEY went to the kitchen, where Denise produced milk for the girls and bottles of beer for the men, She seemed as badly shaken as Barbara. "How did it happen?" she muttered.

"How do most fires in old country houses start?" Julian asked. "It was a faulty electric cable, under the

boards-

"The insulation had worn through," Robert put in. "The current was shorting and the sparks fired the floorboards, which are as dry as dust. Barbara might have been burnt to death in her bed!"

"If she had been in it," Denise

pointed out. "But she wasn't."

Robert appeared to notice for the first time that Barbara was fully dressed.

"You've had a miraculous escape, Barbara, but how is it that you weren't in bed?"

"Because she was at the estate office waiting for me," Julian told him.

"Something else happened to-night something that might have finished us both off.'

With Barbara held close to him, he told them about the road sign and the

old mine shaft.

Robert listened in horrified amaze-

"You've been to the police, of

course?"

"No. At first I thought boys might have moved the sign, but Barbara was sure it was a deliberate attempt to kill us, so I went back to see if anyone came to gloat over the bodies. No one did. I don't know what to make of it."

"Could be boys," Robert agreed. "What took Barbara to the office?"

"Oh, she was too scared to go to bed, so after a time she went across and put on the light, knowing I'd see it and stop. We were walking back when we saw the fire in her room."

Robert's handsome face expressed

the utmost concern.

"This is really too much to be written off as a series of mischances!" he exclaimed. "Even you must admit that, Julian.'

"I do, but at least we've proved that the fire was an accident. You found the faulty wire yourself, Robert, so there's no mystery there-"

"Except that my door was locked on the outside," Barbara reminded him in a tight voice. "If I'd been inside, "I should never have escaped."

"Locked?" Robert was amazed.

"Who would have locked it?"

"I don't know---"

"I think I can guess," Julian said impatiently. "Barbara must have done it herself. She was fast asleep when I found her at the office, and more than half-doped."

The lawyer stared at him.

"Good heavens, man, you aren't suggesting that someone doped her?"

"No, of course not. She was doped with fright and exhaustion, and could

impression that she was locking herself in. People do crazy things as a result of shock."

It seemed to Barbara that he was almost bending over backwards to explain the inexplicable. She thought she knew why. He wanted to set her mind at rest by making her believe that everything that had happened to her could be logically accounted for. Far from reassuring her, his words sent a little wave of anger through her. Having said he would share her danger, was he already pretending that there was no danger?

"Well, if you're satisfied I suppose we must be," Robert said, with a show of reluctance. "You're a level-headed

chap, not easily panicked."

"Aren't you satisfied, Robert?" Denise asked softly.

Their eyes met for an instant.

"Lawyers seldom are," he answered quietly, "until they have the facts before them. The only facts we can establish are—first that Barbara's mother thought she should be warned of some danger; second, since finding the japanned box, she has been involved in some extraordinary misadventures. Can the two be linked and, if so, what can we do about it?" "The police?" Julian gueried.

"You're against that, and I don't blame you—there's nothing concrete to put before them. The alternative is to take much better care of her."

Julian appeared to resent this.

"Meaning that I don't look after

her properly?"

"My dear chap, I didn't say that, but you did leave her alone and unprotected while you dashed off to try to trap whoever had been trying to harm her. Now you're doubtful if anyone is trying to harm her. exactly is your attitude?"

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Merely that you should make up your mind whether she's in danger or not, and act accordingly." Robert have locked herself out under the hazy spoke firmly, and Barbara couldn't help thinking that he had a better helping Denise to part the girl from grasp of the situation than Julian, who was glaring at him.

"How should I act? I don't like

vour attitude. Robert."-

"I'm sorry-I apologise." He patted Julian's shoulder. "We're all too much on edge to argue about it to-night, and we're both worried over the same things-Barbara's safety." He turned to her. "That's our big problem," he said gravely. "Having invited you to stay here so that we could look after you, we must do it."

Gratitude shone in her eyes. She had always admired Robert, but never more than at this moment, when he was giving a strong lead to Julian.

"Thank you," she whispered.

She was breathtakingly beautiful, he decided. She had an inner glow, a soft, dark radiance-such marked contrast to Denise's glittering golden hardness. He saw them as night and day, one cool and sweet with promise, the other hot and sultry, and made for passion. As a man who appreciated light and shade, he would be delighted to possess both of them—and meant to possess one of them.

If it wasn't to be Denise, it must be

Barbara.

For months he had wanted Denise, but now it occurred to him with a sense of pleasant anticipation that the other girl might be a better proposition

-in every way.

Teaching her how to make love would be an exciting experience, he told himself, no less electrifying than making love to Denise. Barbara had hidden fires that could be touched offhidden depths of which she herself was unaware.

And besides being desirable, she was the heiress. Through her he had a far greater chance of getting his hands on the Temperley fortune than through

Denise.

New plans were forming in the man's sharp mind as they had their drinks and talked. Under the pretext of

Julian, he could stake his claim to her. If she turned him down, he could kill her and so collect forty thousand from Denise.

The set-up amused him. Either he was to marry a girl he had tried four times to kill, or he was to kill a girl he had asked to marry him.

He put his strong white hands lightly on Barbara's shoulders and looked at her from those serene blue eves.

"We're with you, all the way and whatever the danger," he said, sincerity in his deep voice. "Although I can't subscribe to Julian's view that this chain of accidents is pure coincidence

"I never said that," Julian put in

shortly.

"You indicated that it could be. What I was going to say was that, whoever is behind this, must realise that after so many unsuccessful attempts. suspicions must be aroused. I have an unaccountable feeling that he may take fright, in which case, Barbara, you'll be safe from now on."

It was strange that, looking into his eves, she should actually feel saferas if the threat of danger was receding.

"Now, hadn't we better get some sleep?" he asked.

"I suppose we can try," Denise said. She also wanted time to think, "We'll fix you up with another room, Barbara, and to-morrow I'll get the

electricity people to make a thorough overhaul."

Collecting. few night-things, a Barbara was appalled by the damage to her room. The bed was a charred ruin. She would have been in it and fast asleep, but for something that had sent her out into the night. She had been standing here, in front of the portrait of Georgina Temperley, sipping her hot milk-

She looked round for the glass. It had gone. She was searching for it when Denise called.

"How will this suit you, Barbara?"

she asked, a few minutes later. "It's smaller, but next door to mine, so I'll be able to keep an eye on you."

It was a pretty little guest-room, in

pale pink and white.

"Nice." The girl managed to smile. "I'm putting you to a frightful lot of

trouble-

"You've had a dreadful night. What beats me is how Julian can take it so calmly. After all, he's supposed to be in love with you."

"Supposed?" Barbara glanced at her

quickly.

"Well, I mean he ought to be more concerned. You're in some ghastly danger, yet he just ignores it-"

"He doesn't want to frighten me." "Anyone can see that you are frightened, and you'd be crazy if you

weren't," Denise affirmed. "Julian can be very selfish, and it's no use frowning at me because I reserve the right to criticise an old friend. In fact, I feel like flying into one of my famous

tempers."

"About Julian?"

"About-everything. To-night hasn't been a success. The trip to Town, I mean. Robert and I have agreed to end our engagement."

Barbara gasped, jerked out of her

own troubles.

"Denise! Why?"

The other shrugged, and looked at her nails. "I don't know. My fault, as usual. I suppose. I suddenly felt it was all a mistake."

"But Robert is so kind and-

reliable!"

"I'd rather have the other sort, the madly unreliable. Of course Robert is perfect, so handsome and clever and considerate—but who wants a perfect man? It isn't natural. I'm far from perfect, so I'm not good enough for him."

Barbara felt there must be more behind the broken engagement than this. She had to explore a little further, although she was apprehensive of what

she might find.

"Is there—anyone else?" she asked. Denise turned away and went to the window. She stood there, her head drooping a little.

"Perhaps. I don't want to talk about it. He isn't a patch on Robert, but you know what love is. I've always been mad about him."

"Then why did you get engaged?"

"I thought he might help me to forget. A sort of sleeping pill. It didn't act that way, and as I knew I couldn't give Robert all he deserves "-Denise sighed deeply-"I set him free."

A question trembled on Barbara's lips, a question she dared not ask because she felt she already knew the answer. When she had first come to Craven Court she had been almost certain that Denise was in love with Julian. Only the other girl's engagement to Robert had persuaded her that she was mistaken.

What now, when every instinct told her that Denise had decided that she couldn't marry Robert because she was still in love with Julian? Could she give him up, Barbara asked herself. because Denise, who had been so generous and kind, wanted him?

No, it just wasn't possible. Julian had decided whom he loved. He wouldn't appreciate the idea of being handed over in payment of a debt of

gratitude.

CHAPTER 16 Seed Of Doubt

IN growing dismay, Barbara joined the other girl at the window.

"I wish you'd tell me more," she said miserably, knowing that the last thing she wanted to have was confirmation of what she feared.

"I-don't think I'd better. should I burden you with my worries, when you've an overdose of your own?"

Denise turned to her with a brave little smile, her emerald eyes drenched with sadness, her lips trembling a

little. What an actress she was, she thought, pleased with herself and the inspiration that had come to her.

If she played on Barbara's gratitude, plucking all the strings, she might be able to get what she wanted without running the terrible risks Robert's plans involved. Barbara was soft, sentimental. Rather than bite the hand that fed her she might hand Julian over as a free gift.

It could be done without him knowing. It would save her forty thousand pounds and show Robert she was more capable than he was of running her

affairs.

"Does he know you're in love with him, this man?" Barbara asked tensely.

"He did, not so long ago, but I've told you—he's madly unreliable. I'm not blaming him. He can't help being what he is, but when I think of his kisses and—everything, I'd give up my fortune to get him back." Denise dabbed at her eyes with a wispy handkerchief. "There I go again, being sorry for myself when I ought to be sorry for you."

"Me? Why?"

"For all you've been through, of

course. I'm a selfish person."

"You aren't!" Barbara said warmly.
"No one could call you that. You're the most generous girl I know, and I wish—oh, how I wish—""

Denise waited eagerly, but the wish remained unspoken. She couldn't expect too much too soon. At least

she had planted the seed.

"Good-night, Barbara dear," she murmured sweetly. "Try to get some rest. And remember, I'm your friend. While you're in my house you must help yourself to everything you want."

She sighed again, smiled, and went

out.

Was it her fate, Barbara wondered, to bring danger to the man she loved and unhappiness to the girl who had decided. He wasn't too keen on Robert

been so good to her? Was she to be unlucky in love as well as in every-

thing else?

In the mirror above her typewriter she could see Julian working at his desk. Denise had said that he was selfish and unreliable. Without naming him she had indicated that he had made love to her quite recently, then switched to another girl. He had been reticent about their friendship, except for the childhood days.

Barbara found herself looking at him with new eyes, searching again for something she hoped she wouldn't find. He seemed to be tired and a bit irritable as he bent over the forms, but surely his wasn't the face of a man

who couldn't be trusted?

He glanced up, brow furrowed.

"I ought to go and see the forestry people about thinning our timber, but I'm almost affait to leave you."

"Julian, that's ridiculous," she protested. "You've got to do your work,

and I'll be all right."

"Robert seems to think I don't take proper care of you."

"Darling, you do! You're wonder-

ful!"

"I'm not. I said I'd share your danger, but if I was wonderful I'd darn well see there wasn't any. I'm wondering if you ought to stay here now—"

"Julian!" She stared at him,

aghast.

"What's up?" He looked puzzled.

"Oh, I'd come with you, of course. I can get another job—"

"I can't and won't come between you and your work!" she broke in wildly. "Now will you please get on with it, before I'm really angry?"

He grinned at her, forgetting his worries for a moment while he pulled her up to him for kisses. He loved the scent of her hair, the rounded warmth of her slim body, the sweetness of her lips. They would move away, when they were married, he decided. He wasn't too keen on Robert

Soames, and Denise seemed to have completely changed from the gay little girl he had been fond of. He was still fond of her, but-

He put Barbara from him.

"Not in office hours," he said severely. "At least, not often." He dropped a last kiss on her hair. shan't be long, darling, and you're right of course—we can't shut you up in a cage."

She saw him off, her heart lighter, then tidied his desk. Putting some papers in a drawer she found a snap of Denise in a gilt frame. She was standing on the edge of the ornamental lake near the house gazing across at the little island in it.

Barbara was about to put it back when the snap fell out of the frame and she saw what was written on the

back of it:

In loving memory of That Night.

She frowned over it, puzzled and beset by new doubts. It had been taken within the last year. It might mean anything—or nothing. But there was something intimate about the inscription-

"Oh, put it away and forget it!" she told herself crossly. "It's no concern of yours."

A voice from the doorway startled her.

"Talking to yourself, Barbara?"

Robert came in-tall, golden, as

immaculately dressed as ever.

"I'm just on my way to my office in Elswich, but I thought I'd look in and see that you were all right. Where's Julian?"

"Out—seeing the forestry people," she said lightly. "He can't be with me

all the time, Robert."

"Of course not. As I told you, I'm hoping the danger may have blown over."

"Honestly?" she asked anxiously. "You aren't just saying that to make me feel better?"

"No, I believe it to be true, though we won't take any risks."

"Oh, you're so good!" she breathed. smiled gravely. Barbara, but I don't feel particularly good this morning. I suppose Denise told you that our engagement is off?" He was sure Denise would lose no time, and he wanted to find out what she had said.

"She did, and I'm so sorry." Barbara spoke impulsively. "I thought you two were-just right for each

other."

"Did she give you the reason?"

"Well, not the real one-" He looked taken aback.

"What do you mean? Did she blame me?"

"Oh no. Robert! She said you were wonderful-too good for her."

"She was pulling your leg," he said, smiling.

"No she wasn't. She meant it."

"Then why did she part with this paragon?"

Barbara looked at him for a moment, then decided that he could be

"In confidence, Robert, the real reason she broke from you is because she's in love with Julian, isn't it?"

"Barbara!" He sounded rather shocked. "You mustn't ask me gues-

tions like that. Ask her."

"If I did, she wouldn't tell me the truth," she breathed. "She's too goodnatured and generous. Rather than hurt me by admitting she loved him she'd keep silent or make a joke of it. It makes me feel awful!"

"You've guessed, but I don't see why it should upset you," he pointed out reasonably. "You can't do anything about it. Julian's a splendid chap who knows his own mind. If I were you, Barbara, I wouldn't brood too much

over what happened in the past."
"The past? I know they were

childhood sweethearts---"

"That's right," he said hastily. "Well, I must be on my way."

As he expected, she detained him. "Are you trying to keep something

over, long ago?"

He gazed down at her seriously, while his mind fitted this into his own plans for taking her from Julian. Denise was helping him by letting the girl know she was after the man-no doubt expected her to give him up out of gratitude. That would suit him as well, but he couldn't see Barbara doing it. She had strength of character and

some hard commonsense.

"Very well, Barbara, as this is in confidence I'll tell you what I know," he said. "It isn't very much, as I've only really been near to Denise since her poor aunt's last illness. Mrs. Temperley told me that Denise was in love with Julian, but that she herself didn't approve of him. No reasons given. He disappeared from the scene and didn't turn up again until after her death, when he asked Denise for the agent's job. I'm afraid I advised her to turn him down."

"Why?"

"I did him a grave injustice. thought he was after her again because she had come into the money. Obviously I was wrong because you arrived and he fell in love with you."

Barbara didn't quite know what to make of this. She wished she knew why Mrs. Temperley had objected to Julian, and why a fair-minded man like Robert had suspected him.

"Thank you for telling me, any-

way," she said, rather sadly.

"I'm your friend. I don't like seeing you unhappy, Barbara—or frightened. As Julian doesn't seem to have done much about it, I've taken the liberty of having certain inquiries made, which may throw some light on the identity of your enemies."

"What sort of inquiries?" she asked

eagerly.

"We know of two people in the mystery, your mother and Mrs. Temperley, both now dead. I have investigated the Temperley end of it, halo."

from me, Robert? I suppose it was all without finding a clue, so now I'm trying the other."

"My mother's? But—"

"You said she was a secretive woman who told you practically nothing about the past. That's what we've got to uncover, Barbara, if you are to be safe! To-morrow I shall have a preliminary report that should tell us what your mother's secrets were. Do you mind?"

"Why should I?"

"One never knows what may emerge, so keep this to yourself for the time being, Barbara. Call it a secret between you and me."

"I don't know how to thank you for

taking all this trouble——"

"It's my duty as a lawyer, my privilege as a friend." He gave her a warm smile. "Now I must go."

CHAPTER 17

Deepening Mystery

HE left Barbara with plenty to think about. She was still brooding over it when Julian returned.

"Anything doing?" He sat down at his desk to sign the letters she had

typed.

"Robert looked in. Julian, did you know that their engagement is off? Denise broke it."

"Don't blame her." He didn't look up. "I never understood what she saw in the chap, and if you ask me he was more interested in her money than in her."

Barbara gasped. "That just isn't true!"

"How would you know?"

"I know Robert isn't like that." she said angrily. "Denise herself told me he was one of the best. She even said he was too good for her!"

"Seems a queer reason for breaking the engagement." Julian suddenly grinned at her. "Don't you use it for breaking ours, darling. I haven't a

you and Robert were friends."

"We work together for the benefit of the estate, but I don't particularly like him and I often wonder what's going on behind that so-serene smile of his. Nor do I like the way he looks at you two girls."

"You're being horrible!" "Robert said nice things exclaimed. about you behind your back, so why

can't you do the same?"

"Oh, so you were discussing me?" "Not exactly." She wanted to bring the conversation round to Denise. "We were talking of love, and why Denise should end the engagement. known her for years, Julian. Do you think there could be-someone else?"

"I'm her agent, not her confidant."

was his terse reply.

"Don't be so stuffy! You've been in love with her yourself, haven't you? I mean, as childhood sweethearts-"

"If so, it's so long ago that I've

forgotten."

Barbara felt that he was being deliberately evasive. Her anger rose. "Was it so long ago-or recently?"

He frowned across at her.

"Who put that idea into your head? Denise?"

"No she didn't say a word. I just

wondered-"

"Come off it. Barbara. What started it ?"

"You have a snap of her in that

"So what? I put it there because the frame was broken, not to hide some guilty secret."

"She wrote on the back—'In loving

memory of That night."

He burst out laughing.

"So that's what's biting you! Darling, it's only to remind me that she and I spent a night together on that little island."

"Julian!"

"At the age of innocence," he grinned. "We had a tent on it, and we crept out of the house one night to If anything, this deepens the mystery

"Don't sneer about it! I thought visit it by moonlight. The punt drifted away and we were stranded. fied?"

"You haven't been in love since?" "If you start dipping into my murky past I may have to delve into yours,

he said, laughing. "I was in love with at least four girls in my teens, but it wasn't serious. This is.

She went into his arms.

"I'm sorry, Julian. I'm still on

edge."

I know, and we've got to do something about it. Talking of the past. mightn't we be able to trace this threat of danger back through your mother's life? I could have inquiries made."

Robert was doing that, and he had asked her to keep it a secret between

them.

"Leave it for a little while." "Robert seems spoke quickly. think the danger may have blown over."

"You've a lot of faith in his judgment, haven't you?" he grumbled.

Barbara kissed his lips and smoothed the from his brow. Having doubts about him was as unrewarding as worrying over what might happen to her. He could look after her, and Robert could find out what was menacing her.

He called at the office next afternoon while Julian was out on the estate. He looked so serious that Barbara's smile of welcome faded.

"What is it, Robert?" she asked

anxiously. "Bad news?"

"I'm afraid it's going to come as a great shock to you, Barbara, but I know you'll take it bravely. Crosby was not your mother.'

"What?"

"I've established beyond doubt that she was never married and never had a child. She was your fostermother."

Barbara stared at him in wide-eyed

amazement.

"Then-who am I?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out.

rather than helps to solve it, but it! does take us a step forward."

darkness, she thought Into the bitterly. The world she had known was falling to pieces. For as long as she could remember, Mary Crosby had been her mother, looking after her, loving her, and being loved by her. And yet-she had always been aware that they weren't as close to each other as most mothers and daughters. They had shared none of each other's emotions, had confided very little-

"So I'm a girl without a name," she

whispered.

"I'll find out what it was," Robert promised. "I'm going to dig a lot deeper."

"May I tell Julian?"

"That's up to you, but I should warn you. Barbara, that by telling him you may put him in danger. Your enemies are obviously determined that the truth about you must never be known, and whoever tries to uncover it runs a big risk. Julian is impulsive—might act on his own,"

"But, Robert, I thought you said the danger might be over!" she said in dismay.

"As far as you're concerned I believe it is for the time being. Your enemies dare not strike at you if they know that someone else is trying to expose them -as they probably do."

"They'll try to stop the inquiries? Robert, that means they may strike at

vou!"

He shrugged. "Better me than you." Her eves filled with tears.

"Why should you take such risks for me ?"

"I've told you—I'm your friend." He took her hands in his, and pressed Just to touch gently. sharpened his desire for her. brave, Barbara. We'll see this through together. then you'll be safe—for Julian."

"I don't know how to thank you."

"Don't try. I should have more news for you, very soon."

"I hope so," she breathed.

She had a desperate longing to know who she was, who was her mother, and why she had been left in Mary Crosby's care. Why hadn't her fostermother ever told her? What was the use of leaving mysterious messages to be opened after death?

Mary Crosby had been good to her, but Barbara had been a lonely child, a lonely girl. For all she knew she might have relatives—lots of them, young and old, people of her own blood whom she had never known. She had been cheated, pushed out of her family like an unwanted fledgling from a nest. Why?

Robert had promised to find the answer.

CHAPTER 18

An Evil Man's Gamble

THE lawyer walked on to the house, well pleased with himself. get the full effect, a story such as Barbara's had to be told piece by piece, and the next instalment would shake her more than the last.

In the meantime, he was going to amuse himself by giving Denise a nasty shock as well. One never knew what it might lead to.

She saw him coming, and wondered what new cunning had put that silky smile on his handsome face. Her own plans were not progressing; far from handing Julian over out of gratitude, Barbara showed signs of holding on to him.

"Well, what do you want?" she asked disagreeably. "Not your forty thousand, I hope. You haven't done anything to earn it, except ruin one of my best bedrooms. You've bungled everything, Robert. Instead of helping you're hindering."

"If that's the way you see it, we'd better call off our second bargain," he suggested mildly. "Third time lucky, perhaps."

"There won't be a third time!

You're all talk-"

"Talk sometimes has its uses. I've just been talking to Barbara and—be prepared for a shock—she knows she isn't Mary Crosby's daughter!"

Denise gasped.

"How did she find that out?"

"She's not as dumb as you imagine. As we were making no progress she tried her mother's side of things, and discovered that Mary Crosby never married, never had a child."

"That doesn't get her anywhere."

"Admittedly, but it's a start in the right direction and if there's one thing certain it's that she'll go on until she does find out who she is. It shouldn't be hard. She has only two names to go on—Crosby and Temperley—and an inquiry at Somerset House would produce the information that Georgina Temperley had a child named Barbara."

The girl's sharp little teeth gnawed at her knuckles as she saw herself losing all she had gained.

"It can't happen! You're trying to

scare me."

"All right. If that's what you think

He strolled to the door, but she called him back.

"Why didn't she tell me? Doesn't

she trust us?"

"She told me. What worries her is that she hasn't a name, and what Julian will think about it. I advised her to say nothing to anyone until I'd checked on her discoveries. She trusts me."

"Which is more than I do," Denise thrust bitterly. "Robert, what are we going to do? You must help!"

"Although I'm a hopeless bungler?"
"I didn't mean that. You said you'd—get rid of her."

"I've changed my mind. I can't do your dirty work, Denise—without payment."

"I promised you forty thousand!"

"I don't want money."

Her eyes narrowed. "That's something new! What do you want?"

"Same as before. You."

"Nothing doing. I'm marrying Julian—if I can."

"Oh, I don't want to marry you."

She considered this in sultry silence, her mind exploring for loopholes and finding none.

"I see," she said slowly. "You drive a hard bargain, but you did say third time lucky. I'll pay you what you want, on the night that Julian is

free---"

He laughed at her.

"Don't be so naïve, Denise. You'd bilk, as usual. I want payment in advance if I'm to save your man and your money from Barbara Temperley."

His use of that name made Denise clench her fists in a spasm of rage.

"Before I agree, tell me how you'll

-kill her!

"Well, it won't be here, because we've had too many near misses, and it won't be another 'accident' because even Julian might think it a trifle suspicious. She will just disappear, and you'll discover that some of your jewellery and the money you keep in the house have gone with her."

"Julian won't fall for that!"

"No? Who was so certain, when she arrived, that she was a crook? Who warned you she was after your money, and told you to throw her out? Our Julian. He'll realise that by falling in love he blinded himself to her true character. He'll remember that her whole story was fantastic, and that's where you step in and console him."

Denise stared at him in awed

admiration.

"Robert, you're a genius—an evil genius. He was the one who said she planted that japanned box for us to find the notes. We'll rub that in as well. But how is she going to disappear?"

"Easy. I shall take her to that old mine shaft, to look for clues, and—"

"Don't tell me! Do it!"

"I will," he smiled, "when you've paid the bill. Tonight? The sooner you settle the safer your fortune—and Julian—will be."

She turned from him to stare out of

the window.

"To-morrow night." Her voice was toneless. "Julian has to go to London and I'd rather he were out of the house."

"To-morrow at midnight. I'll come

to your room."

She shook her head. "It's next to Barbara's, and we don't want her disillusioned. I'll come to your room; I can get to your wing by using the staff staircase."

He went to her and turned her to face him. She was rigid in his arms, but he kissed her with cool appreciation. His placid blue eyes had twin flames of passion in them.

"Until to-morrow-"

"Don't forget what I'm paying for," she warned. "You know my temper, Robert. If I got really angry with you I might do—anything."

He knew it, but there were always risks when one played for high stakes. His couldn't be higher—he was gambling for two lovely girls and a fortune.

"I don't like leaving you," Julian orooded, "but Robert says he'll keep an eye on you—trust him for that!"

Barbara was driving him to Elswich station to catch the London train. She glanced at him questioningly.

"Why are you going?"

"To tell your story to a chap I know. He's good at puzzles, and we're getting nowhere at Craven Court."

Again she wished she could tell him what Robert was doing. Without making comparisons, she thought Robert was the more likely to solve the blue eyes.

mystery. He was a lawyer and had realised from the start that she was in danger. Even now, Julian was not fully convinced.

"Oughtn't you to take me with you?" she asked. She wanted to know

what he was doing.

"I did think of it, but if we both went to Town, it might show someone that something was brewing. I'll be back very late so don't wait up—I'm not likely to have any news for you for a few days."

"And then?"

But they had arrived at the station. He dropped a hasty kiss on her mouth and said he must rush for his train. She had the unhappy feeling that he was withholding something she should know.

At the office she couldn't concentrate on work. She was nervous and excited —wondering if Robert would be able to tell her to-day who she was. Her affairs were rapidly moving towards a crisis. She was sure of it—could feel tension gathering around her.

Robert came in the late afternoon, carefully closing the office door. She could tell at once that he had news of the greatest importance. He put his brief-case on the desk and sat down in Julian's chair.

"Robert, you've—found out who I am?" Her voice was tight with suspense.

He nodded, and opened the case.

"I hardly know where to start—"
In growing alarm she saw that this
normally imperturbable man seemed
agitated. "It's incredible that she
should have kept the secret, yet I have
absolute proof—"

"Of what?" Barbara cried.

"Proof that you are the late Georgina Temperley's daughter."

Barbara felt faint. She closed her eyes, seemed to see the portrait of Georgina Temperley floating before her—a dark, sad woman with haunted blue eyes.

merest whisper.

Robert passed a paper across the desk. It was her birth certificate, giving Georgina Laker as her mother, Hugh Temperley as her father.

She stared at it, stunned by the

shock.

"They-weren't married?"

"Not then-and the reason why you were farmed out to Mary Crosby must have been to avoid a scandal. for the same reason they couldn't produce you as their daughter when they married a few months later. When your father was killed in the war your mother decided to let Mary Crosby keep you."

"That was cruel of her, and-

wicked!

"She was neither." Robert said, with the air of an impartial judge. "She was an impulsive, weak-natured woman who was ruled by her heart, not her head. Later, she tried to get you back, but Mary Crosby had vanished with you."

"She could have found me!"

"She made every effort to do that and when she failed she had to take Denise into her home instead of the daughter she wanted. Don't be too hard on her, Barbara. She was a sweet woman."

The girl covered her face with her

hands. She could not speak.

CHAPTER 19 Tricked Out Of Love

FULL minute passed before she A could control the emotions that were shaking her. He saw her lips move.

"Thank you for-saying nice things about her, Robert," she whispered. "I've seen her picture and I know she -wasn't cruel. How did you-find out about this?"

"We lawyers have ways. Once I knew you weren't Mary Crosby's daughter I began to wonder—about "and we aren't in the habit of accusing

"Are you—sure?" It was the Mrs. Temperley. It's a strange story, Barbara, and a sad one-for you."

She nodded, thinking of how she could have loved and comforted her mother-the woman of the portrait who seemed to be guarding her since she had come to Craven Court. wasn't for her to judge Georgina Temperley or Mary Crosby, who had deprived her of a real mother yet given herself as a loving substitute. It was one of the tragedies that happened in the confusion of war.

"The notes in the japanned box," she said suddenly. "How do they fit into this? Who was Mary Crosby

afraid of?"

"Her father." Robert had the lie "He thought you were his daughter's illegitimate child by a man he hated, and refused to believe that you weren't. It unbalanced him mentally. He went after the man-a young soldier-and shot him with his own rifle."

Rather neat, Robert congratulated himself. The notes had served their

purpose.

"He was put away for that," he went on, "but managed to have those threatening messages smuggled to your fostermother. He was never free again. He died a few years ago,"

"Died?" Barbara echoed. "He isn't

the thin grey man?"

"No, I've checked on that fellow and he's a harmless vagrant, now on the move-" It was time to dismiss a man who had only existed in the imagination.

Barbara put a hand to her head in a gesture of utter bewilderment.

"I don't understand! I know someone has been trying to harm me, and if it wasn't the man who wrote those notes to Mary Crosby, who was it?"

Robert's handsome face became more serious. She wondered, with a strange dread, what was coming next.

"I'm a lawyer," he said heavily,

people unless we can prove what we inherit. She could take all that Denise say. But for your safety, Barbara, and my peace of mind, I must tell you what I suspect."

"Yes, you must tell me!" she cried. "Who has been trying to kill me?"

"Someone who already knows the truth about you," he said slowly. "Someone who thinks that as Mrs. Temperley's daughter, you could take all that she has inherited—"

Barbara sat back, staring in horror. "Not-Denise?" And when nodded, her voice rose in frantic dis-"No, no, Robert! She wouldn't! How could she? She's only a girl---

She might-with Julian Baxter's

help."

She gave a pathetic moan.

"Denise and Julian? No! believe it! What makes you say such dreadful things?"

"Barbara, I think you know me well enough to realise that I never say what I don't believe. This hurts me just as much as it does you. I loved Denise. It's like a ghastly nightmare, to see her as I must-"

"I know," she muttered. "I'm sorry.

Please-go on."

"In you, Denise saw the rightful heiress, the girl who could sweep a large fortune away from her. Had she looked up the law she would have seen she was wrong because—at the time she inherited—the subsequent marriage of parents did not legitimise a child. The law is now being amended, but that doesn't affect this case. Had she known, the money was hers as next of kin, not yours although you are of the full blood. An amazing legal anomaly

Robert talked on it, knowing the girl was so shocked she hardly knew what he was saying. What he said was true enough, but not in her case, because her parents had wisely gone through the small formality of adopting their had. But she wasn't going to learn that until she was safely married to him!

He fetched her a glass of water to speed her recovery. She looked up at him with agonised eyes, seeing a kindly man who was trying to break the news to her as gently as he could. Buthe must be wrong.

"Not Julian," she whispered.

"I'm afraid so. In fact, I'm afraid he must have put the idea of killing you into Denise's head. Mrs. Temperlev knew he was bad—that's why she sent him away. I hoped he had reformed when he came back, and I wasn't going to talk against him to you. You were in love, and he appeared to he."

"It was-only pretence?"

The man nodded, and put righteous anger into his deep voice.

"A despicable pretence. While he was making love to you, he was still

carrying on with Denise."

"But Denise was engaged to you!" "To keep me from being too inquisitive about whatever might happen to you. I think she saw from the start that I was interested in you and impressed by your story. Anyhow, she was to keep me quiet and Julian was to win your confidence by making love to you. It gave them plenty of time to try various ways of getting rid of you."

Barbara sat perfectly still, as if afraid to move, while her mind carefully explored what he had said. She could think, but she must not let herself begin to feel. If she did, it would be agony beyond bearing.

Julian had sent her to the post, on the day she was shot at, and she had come rushing back to find him with a He had been at Glebe Farm when she had been shut in with the bull. As for driving her to the edge of the mine shaft, it could have been a cunning ruse to convince her that he was sharing her danger. After it, he own child, thus giving her the right to had taken her to the house where she fire Denise could easily have started. Julian hadn't wanted to go to the

police about the "accidents" because he had said there was no proof. He had scoffed at her suspicions-

A spasm of despair contracted her heart. She had loved him so much. It had been her very first love, glowing like a jewel in the darkness of danger. Inexperienced and easily deceived, she had thought that his love for her was true and fine, and the knowledge that it wasn't seemed to turn her heart to stone.

"How long have he and Denise been going together?" she asked dully.

"They've never been really separated, although your mother tried. I had my suspicions, Barbara, which was one of the reasons why I wasn't too sorry to end the engagement. I hate telling you this, but—I now know she goes to Julian's room every night at midnight, not returning to her own until the early hours."

"If you knew that, why didn't you

tell me?"

"I only heard of it yesterday, when Mrs. Padgett came to me in great distress. She's a good woman, Barbara, and has become devoted to you. She broke down and told me what was going on-Denise uses the servants' staircase to the right wing, just near the Padgetts' rooms. I kept watch at midnight. Denise came from her room, and up those other stairs to Julian's." A shudder ran through the girl.

"If you wish to check," he went on, in that soft, sympathetic voice, "she's bound to go to him again to-night."

"He told me not to wait up for him-

"Naturally, Shall I watch with

"No-I don't want to watch," she said faintly—but he knew she would, and she wouldn't know Denise was coming to him, "Robert, why has he gone to Town?"

"It's my guess that you're proving killer can arrive."

might have been burnt to death by a too difficult for them to kill without drawing attention to themselves. They know I'm watching over you." The man hesitated, as if loth to go on. "It's terrible to contemplate, Barbara, but I think he may have gone to London to hire someone to do the job for him. It would be expensive, but Denise is rich, and no one will bother about you-except me."

Her stunned mind told her that Robert had proved himself to be her friend—the one person she could trust. He had discovered who she was, and now he was telling her who her enemies were. If she wanted to live, she must

believe him.

"What shall I do?" she asked. All her strength had gone and her mind seemed to be swimming sluggishly through dark seas. "I have no one-

"You have me," he said swiftly. "Rely on me. Do as I say and have courage. We've both suffered, Barbara, and that must be the bond between us."

He began pacing the room.

"I could take you to the police, but as Julian has so often pointed out, we have no proof against him or anyone else. You aren't the heiress, so they have no apparent motive for harming you."

"But if they know I'm Georgina Temperley's daughter, they would surely have to explain why they never told me!"

"Denise would have the answer to that," the man said grimly. would point out that telling you the truth would do nothing except bring to light a family scandal that would hurt everyone connected with the Temperleys. Instead of that, she'd say, she took you into the house and treated you like the cousin you are. She's clever."

"She's—a devil!"

He nodded. "That's why you must leave Craven Court, before any hired

"I've nowhere to go." She spoke he promised. "It will be a better one,

desperately.

"I have a small flat in Elswich, which I haven't used since coming to live here. You trust me, Barbara?"

"I do," she said brokenly. "I must." "Go there for the time being. Leave early to-morrow morning and tell no one. They'll think you've taken fright, and I want to see whether they'll be content with that, or whether they'll start searching."

"I don't want Julian to come after me," she said starkly. "I never want

to see him again."

"Then it might be advisable for you to write a note now, saying you're going out of his life forever because you've made a mistake about loving him-something that will make them think you'll never turn up again. Then he won't bother to come after you."

"I'll do that," she breathed, "butwouldn't it be easier if you told them I had no claim on the estate?"

He shook his head. "That's the last thing I must do! It would show them that we knew they had been trying to murder vou. They'd seek to silence vou-and me."

She stared at him, her eyes huge with the horror of it. As she seemed incapable of thinking, he dictated the note he wanted and stood over her as she typed it, his hand on her shoulder.

"You'll be safe now, Barbara, I'll see to that," he said reassuringly. to look on this as a merciful escape. I know it won't be easy, but you're young, you'll forget him, and-you'll fall in love again."

She pressed his hand.

"Thank you, Robert." Her voice shattered on a sob. "How could he? I thought we'd be so happy——"

The man drew her up to him and held her carefully, knowing he must do nothing to frighten her at this stage. His rôle was that of the big brother, someone to lean on. He gave her his handkerchief.

"To-morrow your new life begins,"

if you have the courage to face it."

"I'll try." She had found relief in

tears.

CHAPTER 20 Parted Forever

was at her usual time when Barbara went to the house. had bathed her eyes, but knew she looked ghastly, and was vaguely surprised when Denise didn't comment on it.

The other was too engrossed in her own thoughts. Although her mind was frantically writhing to find escape, she knew she would have to go to Robert in a few hours.

"I've got a headache and I'm going to my room," she said sullenly. "If I stay down I'll probably start throwing things at people. It's so boring."

Barbara said nothing. After the emotional shocks of the afternoon she felt bruised and battered, but when she at last went to her own room she knew she wouldn't be able to sleep,

She packed a case, ready for her early morning departure, then sat staring blankly into the mirror, hardly recognising the girl she saw.

What had Julian done to her? She would have suffered less if he had killed her-

She let her thoughts shuttle hopelessly between all the people who had cheated her-Mary Crosby, her mother, Julian, Denise. The only one who had been honest was Robert-he had saved her by exposing the others.

She heard the clocks striking midnight. It brought her out of her bitter reverie. She thought she heard the next door being opened and shut. Switching off the light, she opened her own door an inch, just in time to see Denise fluttering towards the stairs in her filmy blue négligée.

Following, she saw the other girl glide down and turn into the passage that led to the service staircaseobviously intent on her assignation.

It meant that Julian was back, and

waiting.

Barbara returned to her room, haunted by visions of him with Denise in his arms. These recurred like a nightmare and made her long for the daylight to come, so that she could leave this house forever.

As soon as it was light enough to see, she crept down and let herself out. From the road where the postbox was there was an early bus into Elswich. She caught it and went to Robert's little flat, with the key he had given her.

In the morning gloom it was cold and grey. How long was she to stay

here, and-what then?

Only Robert could give her the answer. He had taken charge of her and was helping her on towards safety and, perhaps, forgetfulness.

Having arrived home in the small hours, Julian came down to breakfast late, as Robert was finishing his, and before Denise usually appeared.

"Barbara gone to the office?" he

asked.

"I haven't seen her." Robert sipped his coffee and watched the other man glance at a few letters, selecting one and staring at the writing in amazement.

"This is from Barbara—posted in Elswich! What's she doing there?"

"How would I know?" Robert vawned. "Open it and see."

Julian did so. He started to readsuddenly stiffened.

"Anything wrong, Julian?"

"She must be crazy-or ill! It must be all this worry! Look at this! It doesn't make sense!"

Robert read what he had dictated.

"It's plain enough," he said evenly. "She says she is going out of your life forever, because she no longer loves you. That's all."

"But she does love me!" Julian cried. "I know that! I bet the silly little idiot is doing this because she's afraid of letting me share her danger!"

"I hope you're right," Robert said quietly, "but when I looked in at the estate office vesterday, as you asked. she was making a telephone call and -I'm sorry about this, Julian-I couldn't help hearing that she appeared to be on extremely intimate terms with whoever it was,"

"I don't believe it!"

"My dear chap, why should I invent such a thing? I've always liked and trusted Barbara. You're the one who spoke against her-tried to convince us she was dishonest and a fraud."

"I was wrong and—this doesn't

make sense!"

They heard a patter of feet, then

Denise came flying in.

"Robert-Julian! My jewelleryit's been stolen! It was in the drawer when I went out for a drive with you last night, Robert, and-it's gone!"

They ran up to her room with her. "It was in here—" She indicated the open drawer. "With that hundred pounds you brought me yesterday, Robert, for household expenses. I've been robbed!"

"I'll call the police at once," Robert began, but Julian stood between him and the door, pale and shaken.

"Just a moment! Denise. Barbara say anything to you about—

going away?"

"No, of course not!" She stared at him, wide-eyed. "Where has she gone?"

Robert answered. "She sent Julian a letter saying she was going out of his life forever. I know what's in your mind, Julian-"

"You don't!" the other said savagely. "It couldn't be her!"

"Barbara? Of course not!" Denise sounded horrified. "She wouldn't do a wicked thing like that to me,

although-

"Although what?" Julian demanded. "Well. I did find her trying on the jewellery a few days ago. rather embarrassing, but we laughed it off as a joke, although I did think at the time that it was a bit odd. Oh dear, and she was such a sweet girl!"

"Seemed to be," Robert agreed. "I must say she took me in, but Julian did warn us that she was here for what she could get. What do you make of

it, Julian?

"I can't believe she did this! If she did, why bother to write and break with me? Why not just disappear?"

"That's easy-you're her excuse for leaving the house suddenly, if she's picked up by the police-as she will be!" Robert spoke indignantly, "What a shabby trick, robbing Denise, who gave her a home, and letting you down, Julian. I'll ring the police-

"No!" Denise breathed. "Please. Robert. The stuff wasn't worth much -my best jewellery is at the bankand I can't be hard on her. She had nothing, I've everything-"

"You should do your duty. The girl's a thief——"

"I won't have her sent to prison! If you go on with this, Robert, I shall pretend I gave her the jewellery and the money!" Denise dabbed at her eyes. "I was so fond of her. Julian, do you want her brought back and punished?"

He looked at her in a dazed way. "I never want to see her again if

she has done this, but-"

Denise went to him and put a small hand on his arm. Her emerald eves

implored.

Don't be too hard on her. She told me vesterday she shouldn't have come here, and when I asked why, she said you'd gone to Town to have inquiries made into her past. Had Julian ?"

"Well, yes—into the life she and her

mother led."

"She was afraid you'd find out something she didn't want you to know."

"That seems to settle it." Robert shrugged. "She knew you'd find out that she wasn't what she represented herself to be, so she took fright and cleared off with what she could lay her hands on. As a man of the law, I sav----"

"Damn the law!" Julian gave them

a haggard glance, and walked out.

"Now's your chance," Robert murmured. "Don't rush it-ladle out the soothing syrup and you've got him!"

"You've kept your side of the bar-

gain?" she asked.

"The answer's down the shaft," he said nonchalantly. "It's a million to one against her body being found, but if it ever is, her note to Julian explains it. The poor girl wanted to go out of his life forever."

"A suicide note! You're always on

the winning side, Robert."

And you? You've got the money, you've got Julian, if you play him right. You'll make him a delightful wife."

He gave a sneering laugh that brought a glance of loathing from the girl, but she took his advice and went to look for Julian.

As the dreadful shock of Julian's treachery wore off, Barbara was filled with a heavy lassitude. She had drained the cup of bitterness, and no longer cared very much what happened to her.

She kept to the little flat while Robert watched developments at the big house, where her flight had been accounted for, he said, by her note that

she was no longer in love.

"At first Julian had some doubts," he reported. "To make him accept it I had to tell him that you had discovered that he and Denise were having an affaire. He didn't bother to deny it."

"Did he seem at all-sorry?"

"I wish I could say he did, but he, laughed and said he'd let you get away too lightly. He sneered at you -- " Robert's deep voice shook with anger. "I nearly hit him, Barbara, but the time hasn't come for thatvet."

She couldn't reconcile this mocking, sneering Julian with the man she had loved. It made him an utter stranger,

and that helped.

"How long must I stay here?" she

asked wanly.

"That depends on how long it takes me to get evidence to bring that precious pair before the judge on charges of attempted murder."

She shuddered. "I'm in no danger now, Robert, but you will be, if you try to trap them. I wish you'd drop

"What? Let them get away with their crimes?" He gazed at her in astonishment. "Barbara, you can't still love him!"

"No, no," she protested wildly, "but I don't want him sent to prison! I wouldn't give evidence against him, Robert. All I ask is to be allowed to forget. Can't I go away-right away?"

"Of course, whenever you like. But

where ?"

"I don't know. Anywhere. I can

get a job---"

"What you need is a long holiday to help you to get over this," he said kindly. "We'll talk to-morrow. I'll be able to help."

"You're so good to me," she sighed. "I don't know what I'll do when I haven't you to turn to."

He patted her hand and smiled at her.

CHAPTER 21

Duped

BREAKING through Julian's defences was harder than Denise had imagined, but she thought she was making progress after a sticky start.

thoughts. Whenever she approached him she was met by a smouldering silence, a sightless stare that told her how badly he was taking Barbara's disappearance.

It had angered her-made her wonder if she was going to lose him in

spite of her boasting.

On the third day, she went to the estate office in the late afternoon to try again. He was sitting in his swivel chair, staring at the typist's desk across the room as if Barbara were still sitting there.

"Julian, let me help you." Denise went over to him, stood between him and that desk. "I can do a bit of typing. I'm not dense, and I'd like to learn how my own property is run."

He shook himself as if coming out of a nightmare, and gave a crackling laugh.

"You? Why should you bother your head about office work? You

aren't made for it."

"What then?" she challenged. He sprang up, startling her.

"Fun! Lots of it! You're free. I'm free, so-what are we waiting for?"

She was delighted.

"You tell me! Where are going?"

"Anywhere!" he cried. "London?

I want to speed-"

"Give me ten minutes to change." "It's now or not at all," he rasped. "Come on. If I sit here another second I'll go crackers. We'll be in Town in time for dinner, then we'll dance-do the night spots-"

"M-mm, sounds gorgeous—"

They had the London road almost to themselves, and he found an outlet for the emotions he had bottled up, in terrific bursts of speed. Every burst was a hit at Barbara, he felt, for her lies, her deceit, her damnable dishonesty. He'd get her out of his system; he'd wipe the thieving little crook with her look of dewy-eyed innocence He had shut himself in with his out of his memory. It was absurd that

she should have the power to make him suffer. He ought to be able to laugh at his own madness, but every time he thought of her, so dark and lovely, his heart felt sick.

Denise was watching his face. "Slow down to thirty, and you may start thinking about me instead of her," she

suggested.

He laughed grimly, but drove more

steadily.

"Don't be too hard on her, Julian," Denise said, in a velvety voice, "She wasn't a bad kid-just on the wrong

tracks."

"You've a better nature than mine." He spoke morosely. "You can forgive, I can't. You stuck up for her at the beginning, when I spotted what she really was. I should have slung her out before she foxed me."

"She took us both in," Denise "We're a couple of softies, Julian, trying to pretend we're tough."

"I guess you're right." The car leapt

forward again.

At midnight they were still dancing, clinging close together as if the physical contact helped them to forget -Julian the girl he loved. Denise the girl she had sentenced to death.

When the lights were lowered their lips met in kisses that had little restraint. The man found them a strong and heady drink, the girl thrilled to them, wondered if victory was in sight, making the price she had paid worth while.

The hours passed. The club was waiting to close.

"Where do we go now?" she asked.

"Home." The stimulus was wearing off for the man and he was weary. Despair had descended on him again. She couldn't break it—had to be content with the knowledge that he had been glad of her company.

He would turn to her again, and next time she would hold him. She told Robert as much when he asked how she was getting on,

"I'll marry him in less than a month," she boasted.

It was that news which Robert took

to Barbara next day.

"Julian and Denise are planning to marry in a week or so," he said softly. "I thought I'd better tell you. Barbara."

She nodded, her blue eyes full of

shadows.

"It doesn't hurt so much-now."

"That's good. It shows you're recovering."

She looked at him sadly. "And you, Robert? Did it hurt you?"

"Surely you He shook his head. don't imagine that Denise can still mean anything to me, after what she tried to do to you, Barbara! She and Julian deserve each other—that's the worst I could wish them. My big regret is that you won't let me take them to law."

"It would do no good, and it would be hard to prove anything against

them."

"I suppose so," he agreed, with a show of reluctance. "That brings us back to you and what you're going to do, Barbara. You can't just wander off and get a job."

"That's what I did when I came

here." She tried to smile.

"And look what happened to you," he said gravely. "You've had some terrible experiences. What you need is to be taken care of—helped to get over the shocks."

"I must go. I can't stay here." "You could," he said tensely, "if you'd marry me and let me look after you, Barbara. Whatever you say, I

think I've earned that right."

He could tell that she wasn't as surprised as she might have been. She gazed at him with something like desperation in her eyes.

"Is this—pity, Robert? I know how kind-hearted you are. Or are you

saying you-love me?"

"I love you," he said deeply, "and I have for what seems to me to be a long time. I think you guessed that, been legally adopted by her parents Barbara."

"I wondered why you were so good

to me."

"Good? Don't say that! How could I help protecting you when you were so brave, so sweet. Barbara, I'm not asking you to love me yet-I wouldn't expect that miracle to happen —but give me the right to love and protect vou."

"It wouldn't be fair." Her voice was almost soundless. "I still love

him."

"I know, but you've lost him and your love for him will wither away. I'll wait for that day, but—you must marry me now. You need me."

She looked at him in agonised

hesitation, then burst out!

"I can't go on alone! I must have someone to care for me! I was unwanted by my own mother, and by the man I loved. Oh. Robert, I'm frightened, more frightened than I have ever been! I-I think I /could love vou."

He gathered her to him, swiftly, expertly, not daring to kiss her for a few moments in case his passion broke

through. He spoke thickly.

"My darling, you'll never regret

trusting vourself to me!"

He couldn't resist her, and her lips quivered under his like a butterfly's wings.

He drew back.

"I shouldn't do this, until I've earned

vour love."

"You have, and I'll try to give it to you," she quavered. "But, Robert, what about the others? What will happen if I appear again—engaged to vou?"

"Don't worry, I shall take you right away from here. I have a partner who can carry on the practice, and-we shall have plenty of money." It would be Barbara's money, but she wouldn't be told that until they were on honeymoon, when he would make the astonishing discovery that she had much better it would be if they

and was therefore the rightful heiress.

Then, he would insist on returning to Craven Court to claim what was hers. The situation would be trickyit would be his word against Denise's -but he knew he could handle it. There wasn't one scrap of evidence that he had ever connived with Denise against Barbara. Mrs. Padgett, when she knew where the money belonged. would be on his side, against Denise. Barbara herself would remember that he had believed in her and aided her from the start.

Denise would be given the option of relinquishing the estate without any quibbling, or being accused of attempting to retain it by her plot to kill Barbara. As for Julian, Barbara wasn't likely to believe anything he said-and there was nothing he could do to clear

himself.

"You'd leave everything for me?" Barbara was saying. "It's wonderful of you, Robert. I'll try to deserve it." 'Can you be ready to marry me the

day after to-morrow?"

She was startled. "So soon?"

"Trust me to know what's best," he said earnestly. "I want to get you away from this place."

"And I want to go!" she breathed. "How I want to go! All right, Robert —I'll marry you when you wish."

He drew her to him again and kissed her tenderly. He meant the honeymoon to be a real honeymoon, and by the time he broke the news that she was an heiress she would be willing to do whatever he said.

CHAPTER 22.

"I've Got To Find Her"

TO-NIGHT could be the night, Denise thought. She and Julian were to dine alone together at the house-Robert was tactfully making himself scarce these days-and afterwards she must make him see how

married. He could then look after her meal. "I haven't seen him for the last as well as the estate, take her affairs out of Robert's hands.

She was looking her loveliest in a gown that sheathed her in copper-coloured satin and did full justice to her gloriously moulded figure. Julian wouldn't be able to resist her. He was turning to her almost savagely these days, as if he could forget Barbara by making love to her. His kisses had bitterness and anger in them, but Denise didn't care, it could all be woven into the cord that was to bind him to her.

He came in, dark and sullen, with a stormy look that told of his inner conflicts. She understood these moods because she had them herself-times when she could let herself go, recklessly, furiously, not caring what she did.

She took him a drink, putting the glass to her own lips first. He stared down at her, his eyes amber in the firelight.

"What's this set up? Trying to hook

me?"

lips curving She laughed at him,

provocatively.

"Are you such a catch? I don't want to go out to-night, Julian. I thought we'd stay in by the fireside, and brood over our lost loves."

He scowled at her, then his lips twisted

in a smile.

"You're a devil, Denise. If you want

me, why won't you let me forget?"
"Who said I wanted you?" she taunted.

"I'll soon find out!"

"You won't! Don't touch me! I--" They struggled, as she intended they should. She was as sinuous as a snake, weaving herself round him, laughing at him, until he managed to grasp and hold His kisses sent long shudders of desire through her. Her head swayed, like a snake's, but her lips were there for him to take, her lips and herself-

A tap at the door interrupted them. She cursed inwardly as Padgett's rosy, expressionless face appeared.

'Shall we serve the meal, miss?" "Yes." Julian answered for her.

hungry-ravenous." He was looking down at her.

Her spirits rose. She would have other chances, later.

two days."

"I don't know, and I don't care. It's much nicer, Julian darling, when we're alone. The house seems to belong to both of us. Remember when you first came to play with me? You were a grubby, tough little boy-

"You weren't so fragile yourself," he retorted. "Remember how you climbed the tallest pine tree and got caught up by

your pants? How you howled!"

"You had the idiotic idea of shaking the branch." "We had fun, Denise,

He grinned. those days-"

"And we could again," she claimed, "More fun than ever, very softly. darling, because we're grown up now."

They were sitting on the settee in front of the fire. He turned to her and pulled her on to his lap. In the red glow of the fire, the copper-coloured gown seemed to scintillate and throb with life.

He held her close, kissing her from time to time. She snuggled against him, catlike, her blonde head on his shoulder, her body

curled.

Her eyes, glittering emeralds, watched

the play of the firelight on his face.
"What are we waiting for?" she whispered. "We want one another and always have, although we've been side-tracked now and again. Stay with me, darling, for keeps. We'll fight a little, kiss a lot. It would be—such fun." Cleverly, she hadn't mentioned love.

"It could be," he said slowly.

"It would be! Let's get married and give it a trial. If we don't like it-She shrugged, so that her bare shoulder touched his lips. "But we will. I know we will."

This was the moment, and her heartbeats quickened as she waited. touched her lips with her tongue.

"I'm all yours, Julian," she whispered.

His hands tightened round her, convulsively, and a great thrill of victory elated her. But-he was dropping her back to the settee. He stood up!

"It's no use, I can't do it!" he said hoarsely. "I'm sorry, Denise, but I don't love you, and I'd make your life hell!

I've got to find her-

"Barbara?" Denise was nearly mad "Where's Robert?" Julian asked, as with rage and frustration. "Don't be they returned to the sitting-room after the such a fool! She's through with you!

She cheated you, robbed me! What can time in her life, she was afraid, with a she give you that I can't? Stay here, Julian—" Her voice throbbed with entreaty. "Forget what we've said to-night. You don't have to love me or to marry me. We'll carry on as friends-

"I've got to find her," he repeated "I'm leaving here, Denise, first starkly. thing in the morning, and I'm not coming back. Sorry, but for me the whole place is haunted-by her. I see her everywhere. I hear her voice. I---"

"Stop it!" she screamed, the crushing defeat sounding in her voice. "You can't go! You're under contract!"

"I'm breaking it," he said ruthlessly. "Everything's in order, and Robert can carry on. He'll be glad to see me go. I shall find Barbara somewhere. A girl can't just disappear."

"She can! She can! You're wasting

your time! She may be—dead!"
"She isn't. I can feel it."

It was on the blonde's lips to tell him that the girl he loved was down the disused shaft, dead and buried for days, but she managed to bite back the words.

"She doesn't love you, Julian. She

wrote saying she didn't!"

"That makes her a liar as well as a cheat and a thief, because she does!" He spoke fiercely. "Don't you think I know? I don't care what she is! I'll find her and force her to say she loves me."

Every word was a nail hammered into

Denise's heart.

"And me? What about me? Haven't I loved you and tried to comfort you? Don't I deserve anything for all I-wanted to give you? Swear that you'll come back to me, Julian, if you can't find her!"

"I'm sorry," he said again. "I've never pretended to love you, Denise, though I've made love to you. It'll be better for both

of us if I stay away."

She moved towards him, her whole being concentrated on making one final, desperate effort, but he turned from her and strode out.

She stood swaying a little as she stared at the door. Her eyes gleamed like those of a wild animal robbed of its prey. Her sharp little teeth brought blood to her lips.

She wanted to rush after him, tell him Barbara was dead, and laugh in his face. That would be a marvellous revenge, but

dark and terrible fear that vawned before her like the pit itself. It wasn't of Robert or Julian, or of anyone except herself.

To get what she wanted from another girl Denise had become an accomplice to murder, and she had lost what she wanted most-Julian. All her plotting had failed. Robert had made her pay a high price, yet still she had failed.

A shiver ran through the blonde at the memory of that girl with the man she Had Julian seen the shadows of sin in her eyes, tasted the poison Robert's

kisses had left on her lips?

She had no friends, no one to care a jot about her. Even Robert had lost interest. She was fading, just as she dreaded, fading into ugliness, with the taint of evil showing through what once had been beautiful.

A gust of violent rage shook heragainst the girl who had done this to her. It was a pity Barbara couldn't be killed again-and made to suffer before she died. She deserved death for being what she was-the Temperley heiress and the girl Julian loved. Death would take away her beauty! It would be cold and dark, deep down in the earth-

Another tap at the door infuriated Denise. Padgett's round face hung there.

like a pink moon.

"Shall I serve coffee for two, miss?" In the overwhelming tide of fury she snatched a vase from the mantelshelf and hurled it at him with all her strength.

"Get out, you fool, and stay out!" The door closed behind him. She sat down on the settee and stared into the fire until her eyes seemed to be filled with dancing red flames.

CHAPTER 23

Mr. Padgett Talks

A WAKENING slowly, a smile played on Barbara's lips because she had been dreaming that Julian was carrying her up a flight of steps and kissing her on every step. He was laughing-

Her smile faded. She fought against consciousness but it claimed her, reminding her that this morning she was to marry Robert at Elswich register office.

Immediately afterwards, they were to drive to Harwich to catch a boat to the she dare not take it because, for the first Hook of Holland, taking the car with them for a continental honeymoon tour. Robert had arranged everything, had even had clothes sent to the flat for her

to choose from, as there was a risk of her running into Julian or Denise if she His kindness, his selfless thoughtfulness, ought to have melted the ice that packed her heart. All she had to do was to rely on him, go away with him, and let him run her life so that she

need never think or worry again.

But it wasn't as easy as that-yet. The past kept reaching out, sharp with terror, joy, and sadness. Julian refused to be banished from her heart or her mind. She could see him sitting at his desk with his dark head bent over his work, see him scowling at her, accusing her of making some spelling mistake, then coming across to kiss her and admit that her spelling was better than his.

On this, the day she was to marry Robert, it still seemed impossible that Julian could be what he was-a man with the mind of a murderer and a heart of Yet there could be no doubt. Robert had explained it all, so patiently, showing her how her enemies had plotted.

There was some excuse for Denise, who had been dominated by the man she leved, but none for Julian. He had been activated by greed-greed for money. To

get it he would have killed.

Disbelief gripped her again. Her soul itself seemed to cry out that there was some ghastly mistake, that she should search for the truth whatever the danger, instead of behaving like a coward and accepting the security that Robert, in his kindness, had offered.

A wild impulse came to her to run

away now-anywhere.

She actually started for the door, then drew back, appalled by what she was doing. Robert was coming for her. He had told her it wasn't safe for her to be seen in the street. She mustn't disobey. She depended on him-

But she loved Julian! She still loved

Julian!

The agony of it tore at her. She felt sick and faint, then she heard Robert's double rap at the door; he had given her the two keys.

She went slowly, dazedly, to let him in. He took a swift glance at her as he

kissed her cold lips.

he said gently. "It's like walking in the dark, isn't it? But with me by your side you'll soon reach the sunshine and warmth again. Believe in me. What you're doing is right."

"Is it really, Robert? I've been think-

ing of-him."

"Don't. From now on you won't have to, because I'll be with you. Think of what's ahead-for us."

She shivered a little and he put a

comforting arm round her.

"You're cold. We've time for coffee before we go. Mrs. Padgett will be waiting for us at the registrar's at eleven, as a witness. I've told her about us, darling, because she's an honest soul and so very fond of you."

To avoid another meeting with Denise,

Julian went to the office early, to clear up his affairs. He felt a lot better, now he had made up his mind to search for Barbara. As he had said, a girl couldn't vanish into thin air, and when he found her-

He scowled at her empty chair. He didn't quite know what he would do with her. Hit her or kiss her—perhaps both. What she needed was a strong hand to pluck her out of her life of crime. Luckily, the badness in her was superficial; he knew what was in her heart.

He was surprised to hear a car speeding along the drive. It was Robert's, with Robert driving and someone in the back. Probably Denise, but they were

too far away to be sure.

If those two were coming together again, Julian thought, it would ease his conscience as far as Denise was concerned. True, she had made most of the running, but he had given chase. Barbara was to blame for that; he had been running away from his memories of her. The trouble was, he couldn't run fast enough.

Now Robert and Denise were out of the way he decided to return to the house for breakfast. He didn't know where he would begin his search—probably Elswich, as Barbara had written from there. Finding her wasn't going to be easy-

At the house he rang for the Padgetts, to ask the man to dump his cases in the car, the woman to bring him some break-"Darling, I know just how you feel," I fast. No one answered, so he went through to the kitchen, where he found Padgett sitting at the table, one side of his face bandaged, a whisky bottle in front of him already half-empty.

The sight shocked Julian. It wasn't his concern what Denise's staff did, but

he rather liked old Padgett.

"What on earth have you been doing to

yourself, Padgett?" he asked.

"Just a little accident," the man said surlily. "If you want Mrs. Padgett, sir, she's out."

"Everyone seems to be out. I'm just off myself, and as I shan't be coming back—" Julian put some notes on the table. "Buy yourself some hangover pills with this you look as if you need them."

One bloodshot eye stared at him in

astonishment.

"You're going away, sir? You aren't going to marry—her?" The man jerked a thumb in the direction of Denise's room. "Did you tell her so-last night?"

"Padgett, you shouldn't ask such questions, but as a matter of fact-I did." 'Then I've got you to thank for this."

Padgett touched his bandages. threw a vase at me and cut my face open. You've had a lucky escape, sir.'

"You'd have had the same, if you'd ducked," Julian told him. "You're drinking too much whisky these days if I may say so, as an old friend."

"It suits them that I should," the man said darkly, "but I can take it, sir, and I'm often not as drunk as they think-not

by a long chalk."

"You surprise me." Julian grinned at "Well, good-bye, and my regards to Mrs. Padgett. I'm off to find Miss Barbara."

"Are you, sir?"

There was a certain emphasis in the mournful voice that made Julian stare.

"Nothing, sir. She'll be ringing for her breakfast soon. I'd better get it ready."

"If you mean Miss Denise, she's out driving with Robert Soames, so come clean, Padgett! What do you know?"
"That was Mrs. Padgett with Mr.

Robert, sir. She's to be witness at the

wedding."

What wedding? Who's married?" Julian asked impatiently.
Padgett poured himself a large whisky

and swallowed it down as if to give himself courage.

"They thought I'd had too much of her off."

this," he said, patting the bottle, "but I was listening. Mr. Robert's marrying Miss Barbara." Miss Barbara.

Julian was galvanised into action. He caught at the man, hauled him to his feet.

"Sober up! That can't be true—"
"It is, sir. I've been sitting here won-

dering if I should tell you, you and me getting on all right, but I'm scared of them, I am-dead scared. I shouldn't be talking now if she hadn't nearly cut my eye out, and he-he'd cut my heart out, if he knew."

"This marriage," Julian breathed, "are

you sure it's Miss Barbara?"

"He's after the money, sir, and Miss Barbara's the real heiress. I heard him telling Mrs. Padgett so last night. She's the one who ought to have the Temperley money, not Miss Denise."

It didn't make sense to Julian, but he had a queer feeling it soon would. Tension was mounting in him.

"Does Miss Denise know of this marriage?"

"Not likely, sir! She thinks Miss Barbara's at the bottom of that old mine shaft. Mr. Robert said he'd kill her so that Miss Denise could have the money and you, but he changed his mind and hid Miss Barbara at his flat. They're to marry at eleven o'clock."

It was just past ten. Plenty of time. Julian told himself to keep cool and calm, to restrain the impulse to rush off and batter Robert Soames to a pulp. must coax more details from this drunken oaf. Fantastic though the story was, anything could happen at Craven Court.

"Why are you telling me this,

Padgett?" he asked.

"Because Mrs. Padgett's out, sir, and she can't stop me." The man's hand strayed to the bottle again. "I don't hold with murder. I told her so, when Miss Barbara first came here.'

"Who was trying to harm her?"

"Mr. Robert. He was after Miss Denise, and wanted her to have the money, but it's my belief he found her a lot too easy, so he made the switch to Miss Barbara. Bore a charmed life, she did, sir. He shot at her, locked her in with the Glebe Farm bull, started the fire in her room, and still he couldn't finish "Who altered that road sign when Mr. Robert and Miss Denise were in Town?"

"Mrs. Padgett." The man didn't hesitate. "I drove her there, not knowing she was going to do it. She said Mr. Robert was going to give her five thousand if you and Miss Barbara met with a fatal accident."

"And you let her do that?" Julian cried

in horror.

"I'd have been the one who met with an accident if I'd argued," the man mumbled. "I'm talking now because I'd rather be in gaol than live with my wife. I'd feel safer. She's as bad as them—."

The bell rang and he started violently. "That'll be Miss Denise! I'm not

going up-"

"You're coming with me," Julian said grimly. "On the way you're going to tell me everything you know."

He took Padgett's arm and the man

took the bottle.

"It all goes back to that japanned box,

sir, and what they found in it—"
In her bedroom Denise was ringing the

In her bedroom Denise was ringing the bell again, furious because there was no answer. From the window she was just in time to see Julian guiding Padgett to his car. The man was staggering a little, clutching a bottle, and—talking.

What was going on? That drunken fool and his wife were in it up to the neck. He would never dare to tell Julian what had happened to Barbara! Where was his wife? Where was Robert? They

must stop him-

She rushed through to Robert's wing, then down to the kitchen. Both were empty. The house was empty—silent with a silence that seemed to mock at her.

Fear came to Denise. It closed in on her like a pack of howling wolves. If

Padgett talked to Julian-

But nothing could be proved against her! Robert was the killer and the guilt was solely his. She knew nothing of the crime. The Padgetts would be on her side if she bribed them.

Then she remembered throwing the vase at Padgett, and a sob of fear shook her.

CHAPTER 24 Treachery Unfolds

GLANCING at his watch Robert said gently: "Time we were going to the Temperley heires the registrar's, Barbara. You'll feel you for the money."

better when we're away from here—and this time to-morrow you'll be shopping in Amsterdam."

in Amsterdam."

She tried to smile at him, then reluctantly gathered her bag and gloves. The little flat had suddenly become a refuge that she didn't want to leave. It was frightening, this rush into marriage with a man she didn't love, but Robert would be kind to her and it was far too late to change her mind. If only she could stop thinking of Julian she would be all right.

She saw him as they reached the bottom of the stairs. He was standing in the shadows, watching them. Her heart gave a great throb of joy, of hope and despair.

She heard Robert's exclamation.

"Julian! Who-"

Julian came forward, fast. His fist crashed into that handsome face. While Barbara stood transfixed, the two men fought like Furies, then Julian smashed in a blow to the heart that doubled his enemy and, with all his strength, straightened him with a hammer blow to the jaw.

Robert toppled and crashed backwards.

He lay still.

"That's rocked him to sleep while we do some talking!" Julian turned on Barbara in savage satisfaction. "Well, what have you got to say for yourself, you little fool?"

She was staring at him in horrified fascination.

"You've-killed him!"

"No such luck! Sorry to hurt your feelings. You must be very much in love with him."

"I'm not. I---"

"Then why were you going to marry him?"

"Because he said he'd look after me," she sobbed. "You—you tried to kill me!"

"Did I?" He was prepared for any accusation, after hearing Padgett's story.
"If so, I must have forgotten. I was under the impression I'd offered to share your danger and was trying to prevent you from being killed."

She shook her head, as if to clear it.

"Robert says-"

"Listen to me! Robert knows you're the Temperley heiress, and he's marrying you for the money." "I don't believe-"

"I don't care what you believe!" Julian cried. "Denise is under the impression that Robert has killed you to oblige her. You're going to hear what she says when she sees you're still alive. Come on!"

She shrank from him.

"I'm not coming with you!"

"You are-if I have to knock you out and carry you!"

It was madness but—she wasn't afraid. She was less afraid now than she had been since she ran away from him.

"We can't leave Robert here!" she cried.

He went to the entrance and beckoned. To her amazement Padgett appeared. Propping Robert between them, he and Julian swaved across the strip of pavement to the car, looking like three drunken men, Barbara thought dizzily.

"Sit beside him, Padgett, and crack him with this spanner if he gives any trouble," Julian ordered. He growled at Barbara.

"In front, with me!"

" No---"

"Afraid?" The old mockery was back in his voice. "Why don't you yell for the police and accuse me of murder, assault, robbery and, of course-kidnapping?"

He was scowling at her as he often did, and she could see no guilt in his eyes or on his angry face. She tried to tell herself that he was dangerous, that if she let him take her to Denise she would be at the mercy of the two people who had tried to murder her.

But she had Robert's word for thatnothing else. Because Robert had been able to tell her who she was and all about herself, she had accepted everything he had said. It could be false!

A dazzling hope suddenly glowed in her.

"Waking up-at last?" Julian snorted. seeing the change in her expression. "If it wasn't for me you'd be marrying Robert by now. A gay life and a short one, for I haven't a doubt he'd get rid of you as soon as he got tired of you!"

"Julian," she pleaded, "let me think

be sleeping peacefully on Padgett's shoulder. "Who told you to write that letter saying you didn't love me?" he asked, as he drove off.

"Robert, but-"Was it true?"

"I don't know," she said confused. "Yes I do! It wasn't, but-oh, Julian, I thought you and Denise -- I saw her going to your room at midnight.'

"And who told you to watch out for that?" he demanded grimly. "Robert?"

She gulped and nodded. "He said that you and she-

"I can guess. Well, we didn't, and we haven't, though you practically threw me at her by running off."

"Oh, Julian-"

"Don't keep saying 'Oh, Julian'!" he cried angrily. "You were a fool to believe him, and come to that so was I, for believing those two when they said vou'd stolen Denise's money jewellery."

"Me? You believed that?" gasped. "I thought you loved me!"

"So I do, but you wrote and said you didn't love me," he reminded her. "We can sort that out later. I've had a story from Padgett that'll make your hair stand on end. He has a headache, a hang-over, and a feeling that he ought to get out of nasty racket before murder committed."

He repeated the man's story. At the end of it Barbara remained silent in amazement. Then:

"You mean—I am the heiress?"

"The papers they found in the japanned box proved that. Mary Crosby wanted you to know, when she died, so that you could claim what was yours. You'll be wealthy-too damn rich for me to marry, thank goodness!"

But the girl didn't mind how angry he was with her. All that mattered was that they were together again. She would never have doubted him if Robert hadn't pumped suspicion into her overwrought mind, and followed that up by inventing the intrigue with Denise. Of course, she should have had more faith in him, but then-

"I did see her going down the stairs at "What with?" He put her into the car midnight," she said suddenly. "Denise,

and glanced at Robert, who appeared to I mean-

Padgett spoke over their shoulders.

"She was going to Mr. Robert's rooms, miss. Mrs. Padget told me so in the morning-there's nothing she doesn't know."

Julian swerved the car into the twisting drive of Craven Court, and slowed down.

"Before we get there, haven't you anything to say to me?" He was still scowling at her.

'Julian, I'm sorry-" "I've heard that before."

"I'm very grateful to you for saving me from Robert-"

"I don't want your thanks."

"Julian, I'love you!" she cried. must have been mad-"

"Now vou're talking sense." approved, and he brought the car to a halt at the house. "I want you to go in alone, and don't worry, because I shall be right behind you. Denise may be in the sitting-room, so try there first."

The only way she could show him that she now trusted him was to obey him without question.

The front door was open. She went in.

CHAPTER 25 Instead Of Danger

AS Barbara opened the door of the sitting-room she saw Denise in front of the fire, staring into it, lost in thought.

The sound behind her brought Denise to her feet, made her swing round.

"Barbara!" Her voice rose to a shriek. She flung out both hands, as if to ward off something that terrified her. "No, no, it isn't you!" she moaned. "It can't be! Robert killed you. He pushed you into that shaft so-leave me alone!"

"Hallo, Denise—what's the matter with you?" Julian came in. "Don't get into the habit of talking to yourself—or people will get the wrong ideas!"

The girl pointed, her hand trembling, her green eyes almost bolting from her head.

"It's Barbara!" she mouthed. her!"

"How can it be, when you told Robert to kill her?" he asked calmly. "If he did the job properly, she'd be a quarter of a mile down the shaft of the old mine.

"But I'm not!" Barbara couldn't bear laugh. "You're very clever, Robert."

the other girl's frenzied terror. "It is me, Denise. Instead of killing me, Robert hid me away in his flat. He was going to marry me this morning, but Julian-

"I saved her from a fate worse than death," he put in. "You don't look too good, Denise, but here's Robert himself

to tell you all about it."

The other man stumbled in, his face

battered and bleeding.

"Don't talk!" he snarled at Denise. "Don't say a word, and they can't prove a thing. Give me a drink, for pity's sake!"

But Denise flew at him, her nails raking across the handsome face Julian had already disfigured.

"You lying devil!" she screamed.

"You said you'd killed her!"

"Shut up, you little fool!" He caught at her hands. "They can't touch us if we don't give one another away! If we do—we'll get ten years apiece!"

The girl shuddered and was silent, torn between a furious urge to revenge herself on him, and fear of the consequences to

The Padgetts will talk," Julian said. "They're in with us," Robert answered through swollen lips. "The man's a drunk. He-imagines things. The woman will say what we tell her."

"Barbara and I know the truth," Julian said tensely.

"You mean you repeated to her what a drunken fool told you?" Robert suggested. He was recovering and his needle-sharp brain was building defences in advance—in case they were needed. "If you take your story to the police, Julian, I shall tell mine, and I have proof of savage assault—" He pointed to his face. "Also a witness-Barbara."

"I'll risk that," Julian breathed. phoning the police right now."

"But why? You've got Barbara, and the Temperley money goes to her, as her parents legally adopted her. I discovered who she was, and I've tried to help her then-

"By killing her?"

Robert shrugged. "Accuse us, and we can throw mud as well. You've made love to her and to Denise, playing both to make sure you get the money-"

"Just like you?" Julian gave a harsh

"I'm a lawyer," the other said quickly.
"I could twist you into knots—and it wouldn't be so good for Barbara, either. Denise is her cousin, who looked after her mother for many years—for nothing." He turned to Barbara. "Your mother was very fond of her—that can be proved. Are you going to allow these preposterous stories to be told against her, Barbara, without the slightest evidence to support them? If so, a lawyer could make quite a lot out of your jealousy of Julian's interest in her."

Denise laughed, a sound like ice

splintering.

"I could talk—about that," she sneered.
"What a story it would make for the
Sunday papers! I'm on the side of the
law—Robert's side."

"Wise girl," he murmured. "They can't

touch us.

Julian looked baffled and angry. "You can't get away with it—

"They can," Barbara put in quietly. "You know they can, Julian, and—I don't want to charge her. After all, she is my cousin and she was kind to—Mother."

"And it would hurt you more than it would us," Robert told her with growing confidence. "Let's all have a drink and discuss this thing sensibly. "It's a matter of money, and—"

Julian turned to him, fists clenched.

"There's going to be no discussion," he said angrily. "I'm giving you until five o'clock this afternoon to satisfy me that Barbara's affairs are in order for me to take over, and to prepare a statement, signed by Denise, relinquishing the whole estate without any legal quibbles you may invent."

"And if we won't do it?" Robert asked.

"I shall call your bluff and go to the police. It's what I ought to do, anyway, but if Barbara wants to let you off with the thrashing I've given you, I'll allow it—on condition that you clear out of the country and take this—this poisonous reptile"—he pointed at Denise—"with you!"

"I won't go!" she hissed.

"You will, my dear," Robert said mildly, "because he means what he says. On the whole, we're getting off lightly. I have passages booked to the Hook, and there we can part company or you can come along with me."

"I'd see you dead first!" she vowed, and the glitter in her eyes made Barbara shudder.

"Nice girl, isn't she?" Robert said pleasantly. "If you'll leave me alone with her, Julian, I'll convince her that your requests are reasonable, and we'll have everything ready for you by five."
"You do that," Julian advised. "If

"You do that," Julian advised. "If you don't, I may be tempted to commit assault and battery again, before calling

the police."

He put an arm round Barbara and led

her out.

"Robert will make her do it," he said,
"to save his skin. He knows I'm going
to make him pay one way or another.
As for Denise—"

"She was punished when she saw me," Barbara whispered. "I've never seen anyone look so—terrified. But don't let's talk about it, Julian darling. I've been so unhappy and I've such a lot to tell you."

"Tell me what you told me in the car!"
"That I love you?" She went into his arms, near to tears, yet happy. "I never stopped loving you, and that was what hurt so much. It's been like a nightmare

"To me also," he said gruffly. "It's nearly over, but not quite. It's all wrong, you know, Barbara, letting them go—"

"We can't do anything else." She pressed her lips against his. "Hold me, Julian. Hold me tightly, so that I know I haven't lost you."

Barbara had brought the portrait of Georgina Temperley from the room that had been hers. She made Julian put it over the mantelshelf in the sitting-room, and she stood there, gazing at it thoughtfully.

"Do you think I'm like her, Julian? You knew her."

"The same hair, the same eyes. She must have been very lovely when she was young."

"And she did want me. I know she did, because—she seemed to be glad I was here. She knew I was all alone—"

"You've got me now." Julian turned her to him.

She smiled at him, her eyes misty. "You said you wouldn't marry a rich

girl. Will I really be rich?"

He nodded. "I've been through everything, and they've got away with nothing except the two hundred pounds you told me I must make Denise take. I thought she'd have a fit, but Robert took charge of it for her. They'll be well on their way by now."

'And the Padgetts?"

"Gone—without saying good-bye. The woman was furious—not with us, but with the other two. The man—" He shrugged. "He's a drunk, anyway."

"He saved me," Barbara whispered.
"If he hadn't told you—"

She shivered.

"You'll forget," Julian comforted.
"To-morrow you'll have to find another couple to run the place. I shall still need you at the office."

"I thought I was going to be your

wife!"

"You are," he assured her. "I'll have to marry you, won't I, as we shall be here all alone to-night?"

"Julian darling, is that the only reason?" She flashed him the upwards glance he loved, and he caught her to him again.

The sound of a car racing up the drive parted them. They glanced at one another anxiously, then went to the front door.

A police sergeant hurried from the car. He knew Julian well by sight.

"Bad news, I'm afraid, sir—about Mr. Soames and Miss Temperley. They've met with an accident—"

Barbara's heart missed a beat. "An accident? Where? Miss Temperley is my cousin."

"Is that so, miss?" the sergeant said sympathetically. "Well, she was driving—too fast, we've heard, taking the cut through to the Harwich road when for no reason at all, as far as we can ascertain,

the car took the wrong turning, into the disused shaft of the old mine—"

"No!" Barbara cried. "Oh, no, not that!"

"I'm afraid so, miss, and the chances of the bodies ever being found are small. That water's deep."

"Who saw the car go in?" Julian asked.

"A boy on a bike. It's a wet night. Miss Temperley may not have seen the danger sign across the track—"

"It's still there?"

"No, sir, it must have gone over with the car. Now, if you'll give me a few details I won't keep you long."

Within half-an-hour the sergeant had

gone.

Barbara looked at Julian, and asked the question that was in both their minds.

"Was it—an accident?"

"That's something we shall never know," he said quietly. "Denise had lost everything and looked half-mad when they left. She could have taken the wrong turning deliberately, to kill Robert as well as herself. Or it may have been a mistake, on a night like this. Or the danger sign may have been moved—"

"Who by?" Barbara breathed.

"The Padgetts did it before. Big promises were made to Mrs. Padgett and she got nothing; the man hated Robert and Denise. It's no use trying to guess, Barbara. They tried to kill, and they've been killed. Fate often works things out in a just fashion."

He put his arms round her, and looked deep into her eyes. He was determined that she should think only of the happiness and love they were to share instead

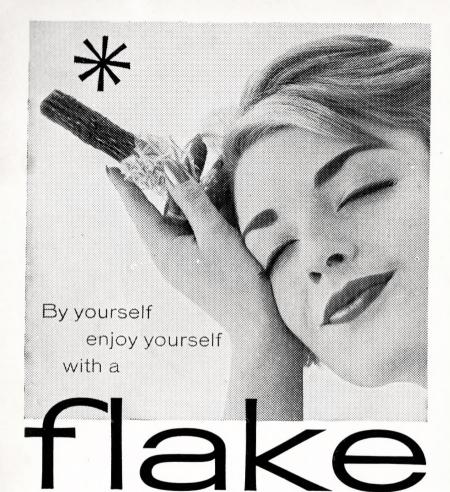
of danger.

And for Barbara, the shadows were beginning to fade away like a bad dream. She was in Julian's arms. She was safe, she was wanted. This was what her mother and Mary Crosby had both wished for her.

They would be at peace.

THE END.

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